SHORT STORIES

No. 766. Week Ending September 5, 1903. ONE PENNY.

"THE CAPTAIN PUSHED UP THE PICTURE. BEHIND THE CANVAS WAS A FLIGHT OF STONE STEPS, AT THE FOOT OF WHICH WAS—A LITTLE PINK SLIPPER!" (SEE FIRST PAGE.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 766.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending September 5th, 1903.

THE LITTLE PINK SLIPPER.

A Story of a Romantic Evening and Morning.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

The Evening.

"My dear, dear brother!"

Two girlish white arms clung about a pair of broad shoulders, and two soft lips met a bronzed cheek. The author of this impulsive greeting was caught up and held in the silent embrace which says so much more than words. Then Captain Leopold Carleton, V.C., D.S.O., set down his sister and looked at her.

She was slender, dark, and pretty—the prettiness of the girl who has almost ripened out of girlhood. Even in the moonlight that illuminated the front of the rambling, irregularly-roofed house before which they stood, the likeness between brother and sister was striking. But Leopold Carleton was taller and graver. Young as he was, travel and hard fighting had left their mark upon him.

"Good-bye to my baby sister, Joan," he said laughingly, "and 'How are you?' to Joan the woman. You have grown up, kiddie, with a vengeance!"

"Well," retorted Joan Carleton, blushing, "I had to do something while you were away. But never mind me, come and be introduced. You'll like the Admiral and he'll like you. As for Lady M., her bark's worse than her bite, and you're not the same old Leo if you can't wheedle her a bit. You ought to, for you are shockingly late, you know."

So saying, she took him by the hand and led him up the steps to the open hall-door that showed brightly in the scented summer evening. A ramshackle conveyance of the "fly" order had halted hard by, and out of it the Captain's servant was already removing his master's "traps."

The house their owner was approaching was quaint and high-gabled, a salt sea breeze fanned it, and from some point not far away stole fitfully the murmur of waves on a shingly beach.

"My brother, Lady Majendie," said Joan Carleton; and her brother, passing into a cool, flagged hall, bowed low over the plump, ringed fingers of a stout, black-browed woman of distinctly formidable appearance.

"What you must think of me, Lady Majendie," he remarked seriously, "I dare not ask myself. But I was assured that I could connect at Exeter with a train that would get me here by six o'clock. Instead of which, I was left on a junction platform to kick my heels for more than two hours. I would have stayed over and come on in the morning but that I feared a telegraphed excuse might alarm Joan. So I have trespassed on your tolerance by arriving at this unconscionable hour."

Leopold Carleton made his apology with simple frankness, yet with a certain formal elegance. Also, he was undoubtedly a handsome man and without a trace of self-consciousness in his pleasantly youthful bearing. His hostess softened.

"You did quite right," she replied graciously, "for Joan has been on tenter-hooks all day. Besides, as the Admiral says, who comes to The Hollies comes to Liberty Hall."

"That's so, my boy," put in a ringing, cheerful voice. A ruddy, blue-eyed personage had stepped up to Leopold Carleton and his hands were seized in a vigorous grasp.

"I'm glad to see you again, my lad," he was told. "I'll be sworn you don't remember our first meeting. By Jove, I little thought when I poked you in the ribs as a toothless infant, that I was touching the spot where a Victoria Cross was to hang. Dash it, we're proud of you, my lad, and I only wished your dad had lived to know of your exploits."

Admiral Sir John Majendie frowned and blew his nose loudly. Leo Carleton's heart warmed to the genial old sea-dog who had been his father's friend.

"I'm afraid everybody makes too much of my doing what was only my duty," he said modestly; "but I ought to thank Lady Majendie and yourself, Sir John, for taking Joan under your wing. I can't think what she would have done but for your kindness, for she and I are practically the last of the Carletons."

The Admiral coughed. "There may be more than enough one of these days, for all that," he rejoined mischievously. "But as for Joan, Pollie and she are just sisters, and have been since they went to school together. You'll see Pollie in the morning, she—she——"

Sir John hesitated suddenly; his wife completed his sentence.

"My daughter is subject to headaches, Captain Carleton," added Lady Majendie, with a kind of embarrassment, "she retired quite early."

As if to emphasise this observation a series of sonorous strokes fell upon their ears. A large clock in a corner of the hall was striking the half hour after midnight. Leo Carleton put his hands to his ears.

"Silence that accusing crime!" he exclaimed. "Lady Majendie, I shall never really expect to be forgiven."

His hostess laughed; she was thoroughly appeased. "Indeed, there's nothing to forgive," she declared; "and now you'll be ready for some supper, I've no doubt."

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Her guest made a protesting gesture. "Frankly," he replied, "I dined at the junction, and so did my man. So there is no excuse for my keeping your people up any further. Pray let me hide my diminished head as speedily as possible; I could not survive hearing that clock strike one."

The Admiral chuckled. "You're your dad all over," Leo was informed. "He couldn't bear to put the ladies about. Not that you've put Lady Majendie about in the least. But, anyhow, you'll have a biscuit and a nightcap with me, and we'll smoke a cigar before we turn in. Then, since you're so anxious about it, Lady Majendie and Joan can have their beauty-sleep, after all."

"Certainly, if it will ease Captain Carleton's mind," said his wife. "Come along, Joan—you can admire your brother ever so much better by daylight. And he will look more of a soldier when he looks less penitent."

With which Parthian shot Lady Majendie retired. Joan Carleton lingered, to be folded once more in her brother's arms.

"Good night, little woman," he murmured; "if you knew how often I have thought of you when I heard 'Lights out.' It seems quite strange to be under the same roof with you."

Joan kissed him fondly and tripped away up the long staircase. The Admiral took his visitor's arm and carried him off into the smoke-room. Here they disposed of the promised biscuit and "nightcaps," and the old veteran and the young soldier lost themselves in the charms of professional gossip.

Their cigars smoked out, the Admiral looked at his watch.

"You won't hear that clock strike one," he said, "not till to-morrow afternoon. How the time has flown, it's nearly two. I expect you'll not be sorry to get to bye-bye. I'll show you the way to your berth—unless you'd like another peg?"

Declining this technical invitation to an additional whisky-and-soda, Leo Carleton accompanied his host through the corridors of the rambling old house, and was finally ushered into his apartment, or rather his apartments, for his sleeping chamber proved to be a panelled cabinet off a fine antique room hung with dusty oil-paintings. The room was already lighted, and the Captain's man was dozing in a chair.

The Admiral went to look out at a window. The moon rode high, and far off, at the foot of a wooded cliff beyond, the garden of The Hollies glittered the sea.

"You'll have a pretty picture to wake up to," he remarked; "that's why I put you on this side of the house. It was your dad's favourite room, too, when he and I were your age. Good night, my lad, you're very like him."

He shook hands with his guest once more and departed. Leo got into his pyjamas, dismissed his sleepy servant, and, throwing open the window, stood a moment to breathe the delicate night air.

The day had been sultry, even the young soldier, fresh from the East, had felt it warm for travelling purposes.

It was pleasant to be in England once again, pleasant to look upon the waves that lapped an English coast, pleasant, for a while, to have done with work and danger and to take his well-earned ease.

A sudden long breath warned him that he was beginning to feel the coolness of the night, and, closing the window, he stepped back into the room. As he did so he trod upon something and glanced down.

At his foot lay a tiny golden trifle, evidently an ornament of some kind. He stooped and picked it up; it was a locket and fell wide in his hand, gaping on a loose hinge.

Within were a couple of portrait-heads, one obviously that of his host, the Admiral. Opposite to this, in the other side of the locket, was the face of a pleasant, rather good-looking woman of middle age.

"Humph!" said Leo Carleton, "the first Lady Majendie, I presume; she must have been a much more agreeable person than her successor. Heigho! I wonder if the second Lady M. henpecks her husband—she is just the sort. Poor old boy! he should have remained a lorn widower, as I intend to do a bachelor."

He snapped the locket to close it, but it sprang open again. To the Captain's surprise the faces revealed were no longer those of the Admiral and his presumable consort.

The portraits which confronted Leo Carleton were counterfeit presentments of himself. One was a faded amateur print, one a "carbon" head, an excellent likeness, in spite of its diminutive proportions.

The Captain whistled softly.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "this must be Joan's. Yes, the faded one must have been cut out of the group that newspaper fellow did of us, after that brush with the Wazaris, when I got the Cross. I did send it to her, I remember. And this other is out of a regimental dinner thing. So she carries me about with her, does she, poor child—it's more than I deserve."

He examined the locket. It was small and old-fashioned, and, thin though it felt, opened in two places, which accounted for his discovery of the second couple of portraits. But he did not recollect that such a locket had ever been among his sister's possessions.

Laying it on his dressing-table, he brushed his curly hair for a moment to foster a drowsy disposition, put out the lights, passed into his little sleeping chamber and, ten minutes later, was in the arms of Morpheus.

Another ten minutes elapsed, or it may have been a quarter of an hour, and then he sprang up. His man had forgotten to draw the blinds and the room was flooded with moonlight. He glanced around and laughed.

"By Jove," he said, half-aloud, "I thought I was in the hills again and that the camp was being rushed. Instead of which I am in peaceful old England. *Phew*, for this relief much thanks."

He was about to lie down once more when a singular noise—part rattle, part whine—penetrated from the adjoining dressing-room.

"Humph!" he observed. "What is that?" And he got up, thrust his feet into a pair of shoes, and went through.

The moonlight showed him that the neighbouring room was empty also. And yet a vague sound, soft, indefinable, not unlike the rustle of skirts, reached his ear. He groped for some matches and lit the gas. There was no sign of an intruder. Yet, subdued and not far off, he distinguished a dull echo, suggestive of a cautiously closed door.

Leo Carleton knitted his brows. "Some ghost-trick," he said. "Is Joan playing pranks?"

Receiving no answer to the query, he turned back towards his bedroom, and stopped suddenly. It seemed as if an icy wind had suddenly blown upon his feet. But he was not near the door of the apartment.

He glanced about him and started. Beside him was a tall oil-painting in a massive frame. And at the bottom of the canvas was a black gap of an inch or two inches in depth; from this gap there blew undoubtedly the cold draught that had attracted his attention.

The Captain put in his hand; the picture was on a species of panel and he could push it up. As it rose it made the rattling, whining noise he had heard before, and a prominent

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decorated gilt boss in the frame descended along a narrow groove in the moulding.

Beyond the painted panel was a recess, and in the recess a curving stone staircase. And on the bottom step of the stair lay a little heelless slipper of wadded pink silk.

Leo Carleton took up the dainty thing and handled it. Then he struck a match and investigated the recess; it was dark and cold, evidently being contrived in the thickness of a huge old party wall.

There were candles on his dressing-table; he lit one and ascended the curving stairs. They led to a heavy door, handleless and locked. The Captain contemplated it for a moment and proceeded to descend to his own quarters. Passing into his dressing-room from the recess he paused to lower the painted panel. It clicked sharply as it was shot home.

He crossed to his toilet-table to set down his candle. Doing so, he perceived that the small gold locket he had deposited there half an hour earlier was gone. He stood, looking from the spot where it had lain to the pink slipper he held in his hand.

In the end, the riddle represented by this dainty article of apparel proving insoluble, he extinguished the candle, turned out the gas, and went to bed again.

The Morning.

In spite of his odd adventure, Captain Leopold Carleton slept soundly throughout the remainder of the night and for a considerable period subsequent to the dawn of a new day.

When he awoke the yellow rays of the summer morning had taken the place of the moonbeams which had lighted his apartment when he had last opened his eyes upon it.

He yawned, got up, and glanced from his window. The Admiral had been right. Beyond the neat, if not large, grounds of The Hollies, the white beach, green-topped cliffs, and blue waters of the bay, made a delightful picture for a newly-awakened sleeper.

The Captain plunged into his toilet forthwith, and a moment later his man knocked at the door with his shaving-water. Leo Carleton had but a second to realise that he had left the little pink slipper on one of the boxes of the dressing-table. Snatching up his mysterious prize of the night before, he thrust it into the pocket of a lounge-jacket that his attendant had laid out ready for wear.

"Hurry up, you rascal," he said cheerily, as the man entered. "I want a cigarette in the garden before breakfast." The servant, an old soldier, saluted and fell to work upon the Captain's firmly-modelled chin.

This done, Leo dispatched him into the inner room in search of a cigarette-case, and profited by his attendant's absence to put on the jacket into a pocket of which he had whisked the slipper.

Then, duly provided with the cigarette-case, he sallied forth, not to seek the garden, but deliberately to "lose" himself in the ramifications of the quaint and antiquated house.

Mounting to an upper storey, he strolled along a wide corridor, glancing occasionally at a compass on his watch-chain, occasionally from a window of the lofty passage. At length his saunter reached its slowest.

"Now," he said to himself, "that confounded stair should come out somewhere here. If only I dare examine those doors!"

As he spoke one of the portals referred to swung ajar, and there emerged a very fresh and dainty young person in a smart and creamy linen frock. She was blue-eyed and fair-headed and the foot that peeped from under her gown was small and well-shaped. The Captain stepped aside politely, then he bowed, and accosted her with much self-possession.

"As a fellow-resident under this roof," he remarked, "may I throw myself on your mercy? I have been trying to find my way into the garden, and as I only got here last night, the house is a trifle bewildering to me. I have even come upstairs in the hope of finding a more obvious way down."

The other glanced up at him and her eyes fell—fell to scan shyly the tip of her small tan shoe. Suddenly she drew it in and blushed. The blush did not escape the Captain.

"Oh," she said calmly, "you must be Captain Carleton: I am a Majendie whom you did not see last night. Pray let me show you the way to the garden."

"I have then the pleasure of meeting my sister's dearest friend," answered Leopold Carleton. "I ought to be jealous. Joan and I used to be inseparables when we were kiddies. But there, I can only consent to be grateful that you have reconciled Joan to my absence."

He moved along the corridor at her side, studying her covertly.

"By the way, Miss Majendie," he observed abruptly, "you will be able to tell me if there happens to be a ghost story connected with the Hollies."

His escort flushed again. "N-not that I am aware of," she faltered. "Why do you ask?"

"I scarcely know," replied Leo with an air of abstraction "I am a light sleeper, and I thought I heard a rustle of garments in the night."

"A soldier," said the other scornfully, "and startled."

Leo shrugged his shoulders; he and his companion were descending the stair by which he had gained the upper corridor.

"Not exactly startled," he answered, "but the experience—if experience it were—made me dream. I—I dreamt of Cinderella. You remember Cinderella, the lady who lost a slipper.

Miss Mary—otherwise Pollie—Majendie halted and put a trembling little hand on the banister-rail at her elbow. The Captain felt that she was determinedly refraining from encountering his gaze.

"I—I have forgotten all my nursery stories," she said; "but if you will go along that passage and down the next staircase into the hall, you will easily reach the garden, and be able to blow every one of your dreams out of your head."

"You think I ought to?" queried Leopold Carleton gravely.

"I—I am sure of it," stammered the other, and though her head was bowed, he could see that her cheeks were crimson.

"Very well," he said, "I will take your advice. *Au revoir* till breakfast-time."

And, without looking back, he went on downstairs. When he was safely outside the house and in the sunny old garden, he burst into a fit of silent laughter. But for all that, he wrinkled his brows a good deal as he strolled to and fro with his cigarette, and the shadow of perplexity still brooded on his handsome face.

At last he heard a step behind him, and turning, saw his sister, a graceful, girlish figure, in fluttering white muslin. He kissed her affectionately, and put her arm through his own.

"What a lovely corner of the world this is," he observed. "Do you know, I haven't enjoyed a cigarette so much for years?"

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Joan peeped up at him, her young face was even more shadowed than his.

"Leo," she asked, "what have you been saying to Pollie Majendie?—that was she you met upstairs just now. She says you are perfectly horrid, and that she wishes she'd never seen you."

"Oh, does she?" rejoined the Captain warily. "What an odd thing—I rather liked her."

"And so did she you," said Joan impulsively, "till she saw you this morning. Why, when we were at school together she used to read all your letters, and she begged two of your portraits from me and carried them in a locket with her mother's and father's. And she just worshipped you over the way you won the Victoria Cross."

"Dear little enthusiast!" commented Leopold Carleton. But a curious light had sprung into his dark eyes, a light that was as much sudden tenderness as amused intelligence.

"Yesterday," added his sister warmly, "she put those flowers in your room herself, and you only didn't see her last night because Lady M. grumbled at your being so late and made a scene when Pollie defended you. Pollie's headaches only come after her step-mother's scenes. And now she says that you're one of her lost illusions."

The Captain winced.

"I'm—I'm sorry," he exclaimed. "I suppose I was a bit blunt and grumpy; I—I only asked the way to the garden. But I'll see if I can't remove any bad impression I happened to make. Won't you introduce me formally and let me try?"

"Oh, yes," said Joan delightedly. "I'll go and coax her out here." And she hurried off.

Leo Carleton twisted his moustaches.

"I was a bit rough on her," he murmured to himself; "poor little soul!" And he, too, went off in hot haste.

His goal was his own dressing-room. Luckily it was empty; his servant had descended, and it had not yet been invaded by house or chambermaid.

He found the spring in the picture, pressed it, pushed up the panel, and laid the small pink slipper where he had discovered it. But before he did so, he—well, not to put too fine a point upon the fact—he kissed it. Then the panel clicked into position and he went back to the garden.

* * * * *

Joan never knew what was the reason of her friend's sudden change of demeanour towards the gallant Captain, or for her equally sudden conversion. But Leo does, for soon after Joan's formal introduction he contrived to whisper to Miss Pollie Majendie—unheard by his sister. Had, however, his words been audible to that person, she would have been more puzzled than enlightened.

"If Cinderella will look again on the—ahem!—the back-staircase of the palace," he said, "she will, I am sure, find her missing slipper."

Pollie Majendie glanced up quickly, blushed, and smiled. Like her step-mother, she had become of opinion that the Captain was a very handsome young soldier. But on her part the opinion was no new one.

That opinion she did not change again, nor has she changed it yet. The only thing she has changed is her name.

Leo wears a certain old-fashioned gold locket on his watch-chain. Pollie had dropped it when presiding over the final decoration of his dressing-room, and only ascertained her loss too late to rescue it before he had taken possession of the apartment.

Horrified at the thought that he might find it and discover himself enshrined in it, she had sought to regain the little ornament by stealing to the room, after all was quiet, down the old secret staircase, the upper door of which led to a cupboard in an unoccupied room near her own.

R. Norman Silver.

The Rebellion of Pat.

Telling of a Wife's Repentance.

"Oh, Geoffrey," said young Mrs. Crayne one morning, as she sat at breakfast with her husband. "I quite forgot to tell you last night that Stanley has a couple of stalls for the Lyceum this afternoon, and he asked me to go with him. I promised I would; I knew you would not mind."

Geoffrey Crayne did not answer for a moment, then he said quietly:

"I would rather you did not go, Pat."

"Oh, but I have promised!" replied Patricia.

"In spite of that, I am sure, to please me, you will not go, Pat, dear."

"But it's absurd, Geoff!"

This was the first difference of opinion they had had during their brief married life, and Pat did not understand it.

"Really, Geoffrey," she continued, "I am bound to go. What reason can I give for withdrawing? Besides, Stanley is your cousin, so that I cannot see why you should object."

"Nevertheless," said Geoffrey, "I do object, and I must ask you not to go."

"But why?" persisted Pat.

"Because," answered Geoffrey slowly, "although Stanley Forrest is my cousin, I have never yet known anything to his credit, and should not wish my wife to be in his company."

"But, my dear Geoffrey, he is universally liked, I am sure, and I cannot possibly refuse to go now. I should look simply absurd! Really, Geoffrey, I am obliged to go," concluded Pat decidedly.

"Patricia!" said her husband, in a tone she had never heard before, "I forbid you to go."

Pat's Irish eyes flamed, and her cheeks flushed crimson, but she did not reply.

"You understand?" continued Geoffrey, noting her silence. "I am sorry to have to deny you any pleasure, but in this case I must forbid it!"

Breakfast was finished in silence.

When Geoffrey left the house, he kissed his wife as lovingly as usual, but did not receive the accustomed caress in return, and he left home with a heavy heart. He knew he was perfectly right, but he felt that his wife failed to see it in that light, and he was grieved to have been obliged to disappoint and annoy her.

All the morning Pat wandered aimlessly about the house. Although most lovable and sweet, she was unaccustomed to being crossed in any way, and she strongly rebelled at being forbidden to do anything for the first time in her life.

Should she stay at home, she wondered, or should she go in spite of Geoffrey? And one moment she was arguing to herself in favour of the former course, and the next the latter.

After all, she finally decided, why should she not go? There would be no harm in it, and if she could not be seen with Geoffrey's own cousin, with whom might she appear?

Besides, she was not a school-girl to obediently do just as she was told for no reason at all. She had never heard anything against Stanley Forrest before, and probably it was

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merely jealousy or something of the kind which made Geoffery speak in such a way. It would be different if there were really any cause.

So, after many arguments with herself, she decided to go. If Geoffrey should be angry, she could soon bring him round.

She judged, in this respect, by former experience, for Pat's mother had died when she was very young indeed, and her father could never be angry with her for more than a moment or two.

Pat enjoyed the play immensely, although now and then unpleasant thoughts of Geoffrey would intrude themselves upon her. Would he be very angry, she found herself wondering. But no, of course not! All men were like her father. Geoffrey might blaze for a moment, but then he would cool down again in no time, with a little gentle coaxing.

At length the performance was over, and Pat, having dressed more carefully than usual for dinner, found herself awaiting Geoffrey's coming with a tiny, unacknowledged fear at her heart.

She saw him coming up the path to the house, and, after a moment's hesitation, decided that it would be best to go and open the door for him, as usual, just as though nothing out of the common had occurred.

Geoffrey kissed her even more affectionately than usual, and Pat saw at once that he fully believed she had obeyed his wishes.

Her heart sank, for she felt that she could not allow him to remain in ignorance, and yet she knew that it would be far harder to bring up the subject herself than to answer a question from him as to whether she had been to the theatre or not. She returned his greeting bravely, however, determined to carry it off with a high hand.

So dinner passed off with much talking and laughter, but when dessert came and they were alone, Pat felt that now or never she must confess.

"Geoffrey!" she said suddenly, and then stopped short.

"Well, dear?" he inquired.

Mentally bracing herself up, Pat made a bold plunge.

"Geoffrey, I went with Stanley this afternoon!"

A walnut which Geoffrey had been busy peeling for her fell from his fingers, and, just missing his plate, rolled on to the table-cloth.

After one sharp glance at her, Geoffrey picked up the nut, and silently went on peeling it.

Pat was puzzled.

"Geoffrey, did you hear?" she asked.

"Certainly!" he replied.

"Well?" said Pat, seeing that he did not intend to remark further, and feeling, to tell the truth, a trifle nettled, "have you nothing to say at all?"

"Nothing!" replied Geoffrey, without even looking up.

Pat gazed at him in astonishment. She had expected at least some word of reproach, and found Geoffrey's attitude quite unintelligible.

Dinner was finished without a word being spoken, for Geoffrey made no attempt at conversation, and Pat, although angry with herself for it, did not quite know what to say.

Bedtime came without a single remark having passed between them. Geoffrey was seated by the fire, apparently deep in a book, and as Pat rose to retire, she looked at him uncertainly.

"Good-night, Geoffrey!" she said, in a hesitating voice.

"Good-night, Patricia!" replied her husband, without so much as glancing up from his book.

The hot tears rose to Pat's eyes, but she forced them back, also a lump of unpleasantly large dimensions, which threatened to choke her on the spot, and raising her head proudly, she walked from the room.

A week passed away. Geoffrey continued to treat Patricia with a cold politeness which was worse to her than open rupture.

She felt that the breach between them was widening daily, and she longed to throw her arms around her husband, and ask his forgiveness; but Pat, warm-hearted and sweet, had still within her a pride which forbade surrender without what she termed to be sufficient reason.

If Geoffrey had told her definitely of any wrong action of Stanley Forrest, and if she had then accompanied him to the theatre in spite of that, it would be different, but under the circumstances, she would not believe that Geoffrey knew anything definite, and therefore she considered that he was as much in the wrong as herself.

On the seventh day of their estrangement, however, something occurred which changed Pat's view entirely.

She and Geoffrey were at a ball. Nobody watching them could have seen any difference in their demeanour towards each other, this being one of the exceptions which prove the rule that onlookers see most of the game.

Pat was resting alone in the conservatory, having dispatched her partner on some slight errand. She was miserably wondering whether Geoffrey and she would ever again be to each other what they had been before that fateful afternoon, when her husband's voice fell upon her ear.

She could see no one, but could distinctly hear all the conversation, and although an unintentional eavesdropper, she shrank from passing her husband, which she knew, from the direction of the sound, she would be obliged to do to leave the conservatory.

"Look here, Stanley!" she heard her husband say, in an angry tone, "you promised me that you would leave the country in a week, and now a fortnight has passed, and you are still here."

"Well," answered the voice of Stanley Forrest, "why should I not be here? You have no right to command my actions!"

"Indeed!" said Geoffrey Crayne. "On that point, we must differ. Since you were good enough to forge my name to a cheque for a large amount, I consider you have given me some considerable claim upon you!"

Pat, her hands grasping the arms of the chair, leant forward, listening eagerly, with an expression of horror on her face.

"And when," continued Geoffrey, "in addition to that, and after committing such an action, you ask my wife to accompany you, a forger, to the theatre, I think matters have gone too far! Now, either you clear out in twenty-four hours from now, or I make the whole affair public!"

"Pooh! You daren't, for the sake of the honour of the family, of which you are so infernally proud!" came the sneering reply. "Rather a come-down, though, for your wife to have gone to the theatre with a forger, as you so affectionately term me, wasn't it? Wonder you allowed it, old man! I never dreamt you would when I asked her."

"By Heaven," cried Geoffrey hoarsely, "if you were not my cousin——"

"Ah, Mr. Forrest, we have been looking for you. Do come! We want to arrange with you about——"

And the voices died away in the distance, as the party left the conservatory.

Pat rose stiffly. Her knees trembled under her, and she felt suffocated.

She moved a few steps forward, then suddenly stopped, for a few yards away Geoffrey was sitting, with his face buried in his hands.

Pat watched him hesitatingly for a moment, with a whole world of contrition and love in her eyes. Then she went swiftly forward, and, kneeling beside him, she gently touched his fingers.

"Geoffrey!" she whispered. "Forgive me—forgive me!"

For a second his eyes met hers, and then his arms were clasping her tightly to his breast.

"Pat!" he said joyously, "my wife!"

Norah Caryll.

"Auntie," said Polly, ruefully rubbing her forehead, "that big photograph of you is a striking likeness, isn't it?" "Do you think so, dearie?" "Yes," said Polly, "it just fell off the mantelpiece and hit me on the forehead."

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Those People Next Door.

The Romance of a Semi-Detached Villa.

I CAN'T think what has come over Maisie lately. She was the sweetest little thing imaginable when I married her two years ago, and now she's at loggerheads with everybody. Of course, I know Westbourne is a little quiet for her when I am in town all day, but that is no reason whatever why she should become quarrelsome and be always finding fault.

The people next door are Maisie's pet aversion. I thought the Gregsons were rather nice at first, although we had never spoken to them. They are a young couple, like ourselves, and Mrs. Gregson somewhat resembles Maisie. I told Maisie so one day, and she was so upset that she wouldn't speak to me for a week. Whenever she has anything to say, such as mentioning a visit from the tax collector, she said it to the cat so that I could hear.

However, we concluded a treaty of peace at last, but it didn't alter Maisie's feelings towards those people next door.

A state of war seems to exist between her and Mrs. Gregson, and Maisie—the old, sweet-tempered Maisie—would sell her soul, I believe, to get the better of Mrs. G.

Whenever I come in at night she drags me straight into the dining-room before I can get my coat off, and, pushing me into an armchair, pours into my unwilling ears an account of all the imaginary things her enemy has done against her during the day. My belief is that the man who wrote "Home, sweet Home," couldn't have been married.

Just what I expected happened one morning. Maisie keeps a few fowls at the bottom of the garden, and the people next door have a cat. That cat was responsible for the first bloodshed, and carried the war into the enemy's country.

On the morning in question, when Maisie went down to feed the chickens before breakfast, as she always does, she found the cat in the fowl-shed, and all that remained of a couple of her pets were a few bunches of feathers.

When I happened to look out of the window I saw that she had caught the Gregson's cat by the scruff of the neck, and was hurrying the unfortunate beast towards the water tub.

I ran out to prevent the murder, and found Maisie in a state of frenzy absolutely unprecedented.

As ill-luck would have it, Mrs. G. had watched the whole affair from her window, and rushing into the garden half climbed the apple tree and propped herself up on the fence just in time to see her cat thrown into the tub with a splash.

By the time I arrived on the scene Maisie and Mrs. Gregson were standing glaring at one another with only the fence between them. Maisie was purple with passion, and Mrs. Gregson was so infuriated that I thought she would have fallen from her perch, while compliments were flying about like leaves in an autumn wind.

I went up to Maisie, and, taking her arm, tried to lead her indoors, but wrenching herself free she returned to the fray. I implored, threatened, promised her everything a model husband could do, but it was of no avail; she meant to have her say, and she didn't come in until she'd said every word of it.

The campaign thus opened proceeded briskly. If Maisie played "The Last Rose of Summer" on the piano, Mrs. Gregson played it with variations; one day she put up a pair of pink curtains in the drawing-room, and the people next door followed with crushed strawberry; then when Mrs. Gregson appeared in a bright green hat with flowers in it, Maisie went one better, and blossomed out with headgear that would have given points to the most accomplished botanist.

This victory cost me just two guineas, and from that time forward I was dragged into the campaign by the heels.

Five servants left in three weeks; I got into trouble with the post-office because of the way in which Maisie had insulted a postman, and I had to leave half a crown for the coal porter every time he replenished the cellar owing to the way she abused him for dirtying the newly hearth-stoned coal shoot.

Then I had to spend £5 in increasing the height of the fence, because Maisie insisted that Mrs. Gregson sat in the little side window all day so as to keep a diary of what we had for dinner.

The summer sales at Barker's about finished me. I had been kept late in town, and got home in about the worst of possible tempers to find a man waiting on my doorstep, Maisie having flatly declined to let him in. It is Barker who has the monopoly of the drapery trade in Westbourne.

"Good evening, sir," he said. "I have just called to see you about a little matter concerning Mrs. Tomlinson."

"Oh, I'm not responsible for anything my wife does," I answered irritably. "However, come in; I will give you five minutes."

I took him into the study and turned up the gas. I thought he seemed rather nervous, and he fidgeted with his hat.

"You will excuse me, sir, as of course I don't wish to offend any of my patrons, but there was a fight in my shop to-day."

"A fight? Why, man alive, what's that to do with me? You had better go to the police."

"No, sir, I'd rather not do that until I have explained fully. The fact is, sir, you won't mind my saying it, but—er—it was your wife."

"My wife! What do you mean, you scoundrel?" I went up to him and took him roughly by the shoulders. I felt perilously near knocking him down.

"Yes, sir, you see it was this way. Mrs. Gregson, whom, perhaps you know, sir——"

My hands dropped to my side like lightning. He held the ace, and he knew it. I was prepared for any revelation bar murder, and I don't think even that would have been a very great surprise. I nodded as he paused.

"Well, sir, Mrs. Gregson was just buying a piece of very choice Lyons silk at five shillings the yard, when Mrs. Tomlinson ran up and said she'd had her eye on it and meant to have it, and as it was the only remnant I had, I couldn't accommodate both of them, could I? Well, sir, there was words, only words, but presently the ladies became put out, just a little put out, sir, if you will excuse my saying it—and unfortunately for me the silk was between them. They both dragged at it, and the best silk won't stand that, sir. It tore into ribbons, and then——"

"Well?"

"They both declined to have it, and walked out of the shop."

"And what was the value of the silk?"

"Two pounds, sir; not a penny less."

I was just producing this sum when the door opened and Maisie appeared.

"Oh, you've come about that silly silk, Mr. Barker. I should have thought that after all I bought in your shop—why I've simply made your business by recommending you to my friends—you could have been lenient. Jack, I forbid you to pay for the silk. It was all Mrs. Gregson's fault."

'Pardon me, madam——"

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"Well, Barker, I don't want to leave you, as your gloves at 2s. 11½d. are really good, but if my husband submits to this blackmail, I must."

It *was* blackmail—I knew it, Maisie knew it, Barker knew it, and he played the same suit again.

"Then I suggest that we settle it amicably," he said. "If you will continue to patronise my establishment I will forego this little loss."

"Of course Mrs. Tomlinson will do that," I interposed, grasping at a straw like a drowning man, but the straw proved unsupportable, as it invariably does.

"Now I have some very pretty study furniture in my furnishing department," resumed Barker. "I sold Mrs. Gregson a suite of it to-day."

"Study furniture, did you say?" asked Maisie eagerly. "Why, Jack, that's just what we want, this is getting so shabby."

I tried to convince Maisie that our furniture was barely two years old, but she had dismissed Barker with a promise to call and purchase something to-morrow before I had time to get a word in edgewise.

When he had gone I began to talk to Maisie seriously. I impressed upon her that I should soon be in a state bordering on bankruptcy if she persevered in her silly attempts to get the better of those people next door, but she only cried, and said I always would knuckle under to everyone, so I went off to the study in a tiff and chewed the cud of my anger and the stem of an old clay pipe. Would to Heaven I had never got married!

Next day I met Gregson in town. I was demolishing a chop in the club, when he entered and walked straight to where I was sitting.

"Excuse me," he said. "But isn't your name Tomlinson?"

"Yes. And yours is Gregson?" I replied.

"Glad to meet you." We shook hands. "I say, couldn't something be done to make our wives reconciled to one another? Can't we put dog-collars round their necks and bring them together just out of scratching distance? It's getting so beastly expensive, you know."

Gregson was my brother in adversity. There's nothing like it for breeding real friendship. I told him to sit down, ordered his lunch and a bottle of Moet.

"Look here," I said at last over the coffee and cognac. "Things will never straighten out unless we take the bull by the horns—no personal inference intended. So come round on Sunday and bring your wife. I invite you on my own responsibility."

This arrangement made, I went and bought a diamond and pearl brooch for Maisie as a peace offering, and started for home to break the news. I told the cabman to drive by the longest way, so as to put off the ordeal as long as possible. When I got in, to my utter amazement, Maisie came forward, and, putting her arms round my neck, kissed me in a way she had never done since the honeymoon.

"Oh, Jack, dear, I've such got a lovely surprise for you," she crooned. "Do come and see."

I followed her into the study with a beating heart. The first thing I noticed was a pile of millinery boxes on the table and they all bore the name of Barker. I dropped into a chair and wiped my forehead.

"This *is* a surprise," I groaned. "Quite unexpected, I'm sure, and——"

I paused, for she had begun to open the boxes one by one, and was trying on the hats in front of the mirror. I'll swear that Barker didn't let her have one of those monstrosities under a couple of guineas.

"You see, Jack, Mrs. Gregson can't wear the best hats now, because I've bought all the prettiest Barker had. Don't you think they suit me?"

What can a chap say when his wife looks pretty in a hat, and, worse still, knows it? I simply asked her where she got the money from.

Mrs. Gregson propped herself up on the fence just in time to see her cat thrown into the tub with a splash!

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"Money? Oh, Jack, dear, the bill hasn't come in yet," she replied sweetly. "But I have kept the greatest surprise to the last. Come along."

I followed her into the kitchen like one in a dream. Stocks of unpacked furniture were piled up everywhere, and the cook and housemaid were dodging each other between them as they endeavoured to get the dinner. Glancing through the scullery door the same sight met my eyes, and I looked imploringly at Maisie for an explanation.

"That's the new study, furniture, dear," she said. "And there's a heavenly Chippendale cupboard coming for the drawing-room; it cost quite ten guineas more than Mrs. Gregson gave for hers. Aren't you pleased?"

"Er—yes—it's rather amusing, isn't it?" I stammered like an idiot.

We went back to the dining-room just as a loud knock came at the front door. Maisie opened it herself to admit a man carrying a heavy case.

"Is this the curtains or the dinner service?" she inquired.

"The curtains, mum. The dinner service is coming by special messenger this evening. And Mr. Barker sent his respects, mum, and says the new bedsteads and the drawing-room carpet will be sent up by a van in the morning."

I felt like murder, and when I came out the man must have seen it in my eye, for he hurried off the step.

"Look here," I said, "if you value your life get out of the road as fast as your legs will let you."

"Jack!" half screamed Maisie.

"Go on, you set of thieves!" I roared, like an infuriated bull, and the man went.

I banged the hall door so that the glass panes rattled.

"What is the meaning of this—this insanity?" I gasped.

"Mrs. Gregson——"

"Dash Mrs. Gregson!"—only the epithet was stronger—was the only expression that suited the case, and I bounced into the study and bolted the door, knowing that it was the safest thing I could do.

I sat there for half an hour till I heard the housemaid's squeaky voice telling me through the keyhole that Geoffrey Stretton had called to see me. Geoffrey is an old school chum, and has just bought a practice in Westbourne. I think he cared for Maisie at one time, but somehow Fate deemed that she should marry me, and Geoff threw his heart and soul into medicine to forget.

The next moment he was in my room, and I poured my troubles into his ear. When I had finished he got up and crossed to where I was sitting.

"Jack," he said firmly. "Has it ever struck you that you're a selfish hound?"

"I say, Geoff, old man, the joke's a bit ill-timed, isn't it?"

"I mean what I say," he replied without a smile. "Don't you know what is the matter with Maisie—Mrs. Tomlinson, I mean?"

"Candidly, I don't," I said. "Though now you come to mention it, her mother died in a lunatic asylum."

"My dear Jack, it's nerves—simply nerves! Imagine yourself cooped up in a slow place like this all day with scarce a friend and only the servants to talk to. Latterly you have taken to remaining at your club all hours of the night."

"She drove me to it," I replied, taking a leaf from old Adam's book and shifting the blame on to the woman.

"You do not show her that you care for her. Jack, you idiot, why can't you see that a wife like Maisie is a pearl of great price, and should not be treated like a dog? Have you given her any pocket money for herself lately?"

"I gave her half a crown for a pair of gloves the other day."

"Well, go on."

"And of course she has her housekeeping money, and every woman puts away a nest egg out of that."

"A wife like Maisie doesn't. Now here are a few items you have spent on yourself to my own personal knowledge during the past fortnight." He had drawn a paper from his pocket and began to read: "Cigars from Molstein and Company, £8; new frockcoat, £5 5s.; race meeting, £17; bouquet for the actress who played 'Joan' in 'Sweet and Twenty' at the Novelty, £1 1s.; wine——"

"For Heaven's sake shut up!" I broke out. "Prescribe a remedy and have done with it."

"I will. Show Maisie that you care for her, that she is the best little girl in the world; take her out, study her wants in everything; in short, set to work to make her married life really happy, and begin operations by taking her for a fortnight's holiday—a second honeymoon."

"But it's impossible. I'm so busy just now."

"Yet you've spent seventeen hours at the club since last Sunday."

"Good Heavens, Geoff, what a blessed spy you are! Oh, very well, I'll try it."

"And now I'm going to stay to dinner to smooth down matters. Hark! There's the gong."

* * * * *

Three weeks later Geoff looked in again to welcome us back from our trip to Scotland. Perhaps he detected a look in my face which gave my secret away, at any rate he knew the result of his advice before I told him.

"So you enjoyed yourself, Jack?" he said.

"Never had a better time in my life, old man; nor did I ever realise before what a splendid little companion Maisie really is. Haven't seen a shade of temper on her face all the time, and the tradesmen have begun to breathe again."

"I'm glad of that. I knew I was right after all."

"Yes, and, taking my advice, she's going to begin entertaining a few friends by giving a musical evening on Thursday. She's just made a list of guests. Here it is, I haven't looked over it yet. Of course, you're to be asked, and—good Heavens! —she's actually invited those people next door!"

W. Newman Flower.

. . THE . .

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THE FIRST ELEVEN EPISODES.

THOUGH my real name is not Olive Beresford, I am calling myself that for the purpose of these confessions. An aunt had left me £150 a year, and just as I was wondering how I should occupy my time I received a letter from Annabel Vernon, an old school friend, now married, to come and spend the week at Vernon Towers.

I was delighted to accept the invitation, and arrived on the Friday evening. Mr. Vernon met me at the station. The house-party was composed of a Mrs. Grainger, Mr. Taskot, and Mr. Dean Fisher. That evening after dinner, a Mr. Bainbrig and his sister dropped in, and a game of bridge was proposed. Neither Miss Bainbrig nor myself could play, so Mr. Fisher volunteered to teach us. The next evening we again played, and when the scores were added up, Annabel told me that I had lost £11 7s. 10d. I was thunderstruck at the magnitude of this sum, and the following morning asked Mr. Taskot what I had better do, for it was impossible for me to pay it. He told me that the Vernons had schemed to fleece me, and offered to lend me the money. We then fixed upon a code of signals by which we might meet the sharpers on an equal footing. We were, however, observed by Mrs. Grainger. In the afternoon I went for a walk, and, being attacked by a mad dog, was rescued by a Mr. Maurice Ray, who was amazed when he learnt where I was staying.

On Monday morning we commenced playing again, and, having won heavily, I was horrified to learn afterwards that my hosts knew of the secret signals between Mr. Taskot and myself. They had managed to secure photographs of the incriminating gestures that had passed between us!

They then blackmailed me into becoming one of their accomplices, threatening to expose me to the world if I did not agree to their plans. I was forced to do so, and had a hand in robbing the Bainbrigs and two wealthy friends of theirs, the brothers Garford, a night later. Earlier in the same day both Mrs. Grainger and Mr. Taskot left Vernon Towers.

I found out that the fateful photographs were kept in a bureau in the study, and, determined to get them at all costs, I stole down at dead of night to the room. While trying to force open the lock I heard footsteps, and crouched behind a chair.

The visitors were my hosts, who had come to remove the photographs to a new hiding-place. They dropped them behind the overmantel. Would they discover me?

EPISODE TWELVE.

A Friend in Need.

"THERE!" observed Annabel. "She'll be sold if she tries the game of abstraction!"

There was a low laugh of amusement from the pair of tricksters. Then the light was switched off, the door was gently closed, and I was once more alone—with the incriminating photographs within my reach.

Five minutes later I was in my own room, burning them one by one. When I put a box of matches with the little spirit lamp which I use for heating my waving irons, I little imagined what splendid service they would render me. With their aid I was able to destroy every scrap of proof of yesterday's folly, and I could have danced with joy when I opened my casement and scattered the carefully-collected ashes to the four winds of Heaven.

Not even a particle of burnt ash remained to tell the story of my midnight achievement, and it was I who had the best of the bargain this time!

"If only my clever friends had been wise enough to take their proofs with them instead of hiding them where I could find them," was my triumphant reflection, "they would not have had to face the failure of their wicked scheme. But the most cunning people overreach themselves habitually, and Mr. and Mrs. Vernon have just exemplified the general rule."

My relief of mind and my fatigue of body were so great that I slept until eight o'clock, and I was barely dressed when the breakfast bell rang. But I had resolved not to eat another crumb in the house of these harpies, and did not hurry downstairs until I was ready to take a walk upon which I had suddenly decided.

There was no train for some hours that would serve my purpose. Even if there had been I could not carry my luggage all the way to the station myself, and I would accept no further service from anybody employed by the Vernons, so I had plenty to do while I was out.

After walking to the village near which I was almost run down by the mad dog, I meant to purchase a breakfast of milk and bread, supplemented by some fruit. This would fortify me to endure the possible prospect of a scene with the Vernons, who would be enraged when they discovered that their intended victim had slipped through their fingers.

I had also to arrange about a conveyance to fetch myself and my luggage. And I had a fancy for calling upon Miss Bainbrig, for I did not want her to think I was quite so bad as the Vernons would be sure to paint me. Finally, the money I had won from the Bainbrigs and the Garfords weighed heavily on my conscience, and I was anxious to devise some means of restoring it without being too explicit about last night's doings.

As I passed through the hall on my way out I met the parlourmaid.

"Breakfast is just ready, miss," she said, noting that I was in walking attire.

"I don't feel equal to taking any breakfast yet. Tell your mistress that I have gone out for a walk to see if the fresh air will do me good."

"Very well, miss," was the maid's assent to these languidly spoken words, and I knew exactly what would follow. She would tell Annabel that I had gone out looking ill, and com-

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plaining of being so out of sorts as to be unable to take my breakfast. Then Annabel would smile to herself, and tell her husband that I was upset by the knowledge that I had no escape from the duties they had assigned to me.

Later on, when they discovered that the pictures which they had held over me as a threat had disappeared, they would put a different construction upon my absence from the breakfast table, and I had no difficulty in picturing their fury.

It was a long walk to the village, but I was all the better pleased at that, for I did not want to call upon Miss Bainbrig until she was presumably ready to receive visitors, and the journey to the village would pass the time away nicely.

The lane I had to traverse was the same one in which Mr. Maurice Ray rendered me such signal service, and my thoughts naturally reverted to him when I came in sight of the torn furze bushes which showed the strain that had been put upon them when I was lifted out of harm's way.

"Of course he had heard something about the doings at Vernon Towers," I thought. "And that accounts for the curious way in which he received my information about where I was staying. Perhaps he thinks I am as bad as the Vernons themselves, so it is just as well that we are not likely to meet again. Good gracious! There's the very man!"

It was true. He was sitting on the bankside, sketching a lovely bit of scenery that was revealed by a bend in the lane, and I hoped that he was too much engrossed with his pleasant task to notice me. The better to evade recognition I put up my parasol, and sedulously kept it on the side which would best hide me from his view.

Perhaps it was because I let the sun blaze on myself instead of on my parasol that I attracted the notice I wished to avoid. Anyhow, I had not gone much further before I heard swift footsteps following mine, and an eager voice exclaimed: "Miss Beresford! You are surely not going to pass me without even saying 'Good morning'?"

After that, what could I do but show that I was really as pleased to see Mr. Ray as he was to see me?

"I saw that you were busy," I said shyly, "and artists do not like being interrupted at their work."

"No," was the smiling reply. "As a rule they do not. But when the interruption is even pleasanter than the work itself they are delighted, just as I am."

This was said in an honest, open way which ought to have won a smile from me. But somehow it had just the reverse effect, and, greatly to Mr. Ray's concern and my own vexation, I burst into a passion of bitter tears.

"Look here, little woman," were the first words to which I was able to give intelligent heed, "you are in trouble, and I am not at all surprised. In fact, I fancy I can make a shrewd guess at what has happened to you."

So spoke Mr. Ray, but my experiences had been so strange that I did not see how he could possibly guess their nature, and I shook my head despondently.

"I don't know why I was silly enough to cry," I said, "unless it is that I felt so utterly alone in the world. As for trouble—yes, I have had plenty of that since I came to visit the Vernons. But I hope the worst is over now, and after this afternoon I do not intend to see them again."

"Believe me, they are difficult people to get rid of, if once they gather anybody into their clutches. If you will not think me presumptuous, I should like to ask you to confide in me. You cannot be too careful in dealing with people like the Vernons, and I may perhaps be able to help you."

It was odd that I should feel such absolute confidence in Mr. Ray as I did. But there was something so open, so honest, and so winning in his manner, that I forgot how little he and I knew of each other, and I forthwith began to tell him what had happened to me since I left home.

"Suppose we sit down on this old tree stump," he said kindly. "You have already walked some distance, and as you can talk just as well sitting as you can standing, there is no reason why you should tire yourself unnecessarily."

A few minutes later we were sitting side by side on the tree stump, and I continued my story, confessing every item of the folly of which I had been guilty. I was sure he would despise me for what I had done, and for being so easily misled. But I was determined not to spare myself the punishment which my folly deserved, and I knew also that half-confidences were hardly a fair tender to the man who had already saved my life, and who now showed himself willing to help me to save my reputation.

He listened without comment until I had finished. Then he said kindly: "Miss Beresford, do not take yourself to task quite so severely. It is difficult for outsiders to judge the virtual impossibility of resisting such influences as have been brought to bear upon you. But I know the Vernons to be a pair of unscrupulous harpies who will hesitate at nothing to serve their wicked ends, and due allowance must be made for your inexperience. Against Mr. Taskot I would have you be on your guard, though I cannot say that I think him very culpable for trying to fight the enemy with their own weapons. But he ought not to have drawn you into so shady a business, and he is much to blame for bringing you into the toils of your opponents."

"If only I could have avoided last night's doings, I would not have been quite so ashamed of myself."

"What do you intend to do about your winnings?"

"I am going to see the Bainbrigs before I go back to the Towers for my luggage. And I shall insist upon their taking the money back. That which was won from the Garfords can be given to them by Mr. Bainbrig. I only hope they will not despise me too much."

"They will not despise you, for they will understand that you were terrorised into doing what you did last night, and the best proof of real honesty that you can give them is to refuse to keep your ill-gotten gains. Apart from everything else, they ought to know what to expect if they go to the Towers again. But how dreadfully pale you look. All this worry is making you ill."

"I do feel rather faint. The fact is, I came out without any breakfast, because I did not want to accept any more of the Vernons' hospitality."

"There is a farm close by where you can get some new milk and bread. Let me take you there this minute."

I was very glad to do as Mr. Ray suggested, and the half-hour that followed was a very blissful one, in spite of the unpleasantness with which my final departure from Vernon Towers was sure to be accompanied. My new friend was so thoroughly at ease that he made me forget everything but that he and I were strangely familiar with each other, and I found the time all too short when it became advisable to start for the residence of Mr. and Miss Bainbrig.

"I'll see you to the door," said Mr. Ray, gathering up the sketching materials which he had brought with him. "Mr. Bainbrig will be sure to escort you back to the Towers,

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and in the meanwhile I will go and make arrangements to transport you and your luggage to the station. It is now eleven o'clock. You ought to leave by the two-fifteen, so you cannot afford to waste much time before you return for your belongings."

I thought it very kind of Mr. Ray to take so much trouble on my behalf, and his comforting presence made me almost forget that I still had one or two unpleasant tasks before me. But when, having escorted me to the door of "The Mullions," he rang the bell and then left me to perform my work of restitution, I immediately felt myself afloat upon a sea of trouble again.

"I wish he could be always with me," I sighed. "Things would never go wrong then, and I should never get into difficulties."

Always with me!

The wish had come unbidden. But, having come, it was a revelation, and I blushed with confusion to think how soon I had lost my heart to a stranger. I was still blushing when Miss Bainbrig's maid opened the door, in answer to the ring.

"Miss Bainbrig?" I asked, my courage sinking into my shoes, for I had a sudden fear that my story might be misconstrued into a malicious attempt to damage the Vernons, in revenge for a fancied slight.

What then was my relief when the maid informed me that both her master and her mistress had gone out.

"There was a telegram," she continued, "and they drove off in a hurry."

"And they are not likely to be back soon?"

"That I can't say, miss. There wasn't anything said about when they were coming back."

Now I had a good sum of money upon me, money to which I did not consider myself to have any right, and I did not want to risk taking it back to the Towers with me. Neither did I want to delay at least partial explanations until after the Bainbrigs had had their minds poisoned against me by the Vernons. So I asked the maid to allow me to write a note, and in a very few minutes I had concocted the following epistle:

"DEAR MISS BAINBRIG,—*I would have liked to give you some verbal explanations of certain things which occurred last night, so am sorry to have missed you. I will write more fully after I arrive at my own home. In the meantime, I inclose herewith my share of the money that was won from you and your friends when playing Bridge. You will know how much Mr. Vernon and I won from you, and after deducting your share, you will do me a great favour if you will kindly pass the balance on to the two gentlemen who came to the Towers with you. Please understand that I cannot possibly keep any of the money myself, for it was won by unfair means, and it is not honestly mine to keep. I shall have no chance of seeing you again, for I am going home this afternoon, and it is not likely that Vernon Towers will ever again see*

Yours truly,

OLIVE BERESFORD.

This letter, with the money, was put in a large envelope, and given into the keeping of the maid, and I now hurried back to ring the curtain upon my unfortunate visit to Vernon Towers.

EPISODE THIRTEEN.

"There is the Thief!"

THE scenery hereabouts was very lovely; and the air was full of Nature's most witching music. But I had eyes and ears for very little beyond the contemplation of my own position. I was nervous and ill at ease, and every step that took me nearer to the wicked couple who sought to ruin me seemed also to bring me nearer to some further trouble whose lengthening shadow was gradually casting a witch-like spell over me.

I was assailed by a dreadful foreboding of coming misery, and so strong was the feeling that my footsteps lagged more and more, as if they would fain help me to postpone the evil moment.

Yet, when I at last found myself in the big entrance hall, there was nothing abnormal in its aspect. Nor did Annabel, who saw me come in, look violently aggressive, as I had feared would be the case. She certainly looked scornful, and I felt sure that she knew of the loss of the photographs, though she must have been exceedingly puzzled to understand how I could possibly have guessed at their new hiding place.

"I hear you had a headache this morning," she sneered. "Nocturnal rambles and night air don't agree with you, I suppose?"

"Nothing here agrees with me," was my steadily spoken reply. "So I am leaving this afternoon, and hope to recover my health in the quietude of my own home."

"Would you like some help over packing your clothes? If so, I shall be delighted to expedite your departure."

"Thank you, I can manage without assistance at present. When I have finished packing, I may trouble one of your servants to carry my dress-basket downstairs for me."

"Certainly. You have only to command, and the whole establishment shall be at your service. I have, however, one favour to ask of you. It will hardly be kind or courteous to end your visit without saying good-bye to Harry, and you will find us both in the drawing-room when you come down."

I should have preferred to see neither Annabel nor her husband again. But, when I was quite ready for departure, I felt constrained to be at least outwardly ceremonious, and went into the drawing-room for the final leavetaking.

Very much to my surprise, I saw the Bainbrigs there already, looking so ill at ease that I knew they had been regaled with my real and imaginary delinquencies. Before I had time to say a word, Annabel called out in high, staccato tones: "Has your luggage been brought downstairs, Olive?"

"Yes," I replied. "And I have to thank you for the help given me."

"Pardon me," was the ominous reply. "You refused help, and that was what clinched my suspicions. Constable, come into the hall, and do your duty. You will search this young lady's luggage, and if, as I suspect, she has stolen my jewellery, you must arrest her at once."

So the horror had come!

And it was worse than anything I had dreaded. Of course I knew that the charge was a trumped-up one. But I guessed in an instant that some jewellery had been hidden in my already half-filled dress-basket during my absence, and I sank back in an agony of fear when at last the policeman, who had waited in an inner room until he was ordered to begin the search, brought out of my basket a small jewel-case; and, turning to me, said:

"Miss Beresford, it is my duty to arrest you, at the instance of Mrs. Vernon, on the charge of theft!"

Another long instalment of this fascinating series next week. Be sure you do not miss it.

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THE PERFIDY OF EDITH ALLEYNE.

The Story of a Secret Marriage and a Disappointment.

"I SAY, mother, who is that girl out there? By Jove, she's rather pretty and her figure is grand! Who is she?"

Lady Blackhurst frowned slightly at her son's remarks and questions; the evident admiration in his tones was somewhat disquieting.

"That 'girl' is twenty-four, Ronald! *I* should call her a woman!"

"Oh, we won't quarrel over a term, mother!" laughed the handsome Ronald Blackhurst. "Who is she? That's the main point. Is she staying with you? You didn't tell me you had a visitor!"

"Don't be absurd, Ronald! Of course, you understand that she is Miss Edith Alleyne, the young lady whom I engaged as companion about three months ago. I fancy that she must belong to a very distant branch of the Alleynes; she knows nothing of the members of the family who usually figure in Society. She has been brought up far above her station in life, I should say; certainly her education and manner are superior to her circumstances."

When Lady Blackhurst commenced this little speech she was bent on showing her only son that Miss Alleyne was a nobody; but as she proceeded she forgot this intention and spoke quite fairly about the young lady. As she finished she chanced to catch a glimpse of a peculiar expression in her son's eyes, and she was about to continue when he broke in:

"I should say that she has seen a lot of trouble, in spite of her comparative youth," he observed thoughtfully. "There is a sadness about the face as I saw it just now; a thoughtfulness that comes only with age—the age of years or the age of sorrow! I should like to know something about her, mother. I feel a kind of compassionate interest in your companion."

He sank lazily into a chair. Miss Alleyne had passed out of sight, so it was useless to remain at the window. Lady Blackhurst sat with knitted brows for several seconds, her son watching her with concealed amusement; she had not expected Ronald to be so foolish, and she must stop it at once.

"Ronald," she said impressively, "I do not expect you to make a fool of yourself! Now, my boy, you need not look surprised, for you know perfectly well what I mean! When you fall in love you will find someone more suited to your position in life than Miss Alleyne! I do not like the idea of having to give her notice, and, both for my sake and her own, I hope it will not be necessary."

"You put the matter quite plainly, as you always do, mother!" said Ronald, flushing just a little. "You are wont to go straight to the point. I don't think there is any occasion to worry yourself; surely I can take an interest in a member of the household without being accused of a desire to fall in love with her?"

"I hope so," remarked Lady Blackhurst drily. "What are your plans for to-morrow?" she continued, turning the conversation.

Ronald talked quite unconcernedly, and no further reference was made to Miss Alleyne.

Notwithstanding her customary shrewdness, Lady Blackhurst was deceived by this nonchalance, and felt vexed with herself for having answered Ronald as she had done about the companion; she had probably caused him to take more notice of her than he otherwise would have done. At any rate, Ronald was only home for three weeks, then he would be off to Scotland, and after that he would return to Malta to take up his official duties again.

During the next three or four days Ronald showed no particular interest in Miss Alleyne, and Lady Blackhurst's mind became perfectly easy on that score; she was, in fact, more exercised in mind on another point—one to which his father, Sir Walter Blackhurst, had referred; this was an unfortunate predilection on Ronald's part for card playing.

"Of course," admitted his father, "he doesn't see anything in it, and I don't believe for a moment that he devotes so much attention to it for the mere sake of winning a few pounds. It is merely a pastime. Yet I wish he would find another, for this is apt to prove costly. I had to help him out only a couple of months ago. Perhaps you can influence him, my dear."

However, Ronald had not quite lost sight of Miss Alleyne, although he appeared to have done so. After the first talk with his mother he had several times caught himself watching her and thinking of her; then he had pulled himself up abruptly.

"It's so ordinary, to fall in love with a companion!" he mused. "I simply mustn't do it. There are plenty of other girls. We—or she—would be 'cut' in Society, and that wouldn't mean happiness either for me or her. I believe there's a story behind that grave face, but that isn't *my* business!"

Ronald was a favourite in the homes of the county gentry, and his three weeks' stay at Blackhurst Lodge promised to be a round of amusements outside that residence rather than a holiday with his father and mother. Sometimes they went with him, but often he went alone.

Almost half his holiday was gone. It was a lovely afternoon, and he was walking through a grand old wood, the pride and delight of the district, but he had no eyes for the beauty of Nature. His head was slightly bent, his brows contracted; some uneasy reflections were troubling him.

He had reached an open glade where the rich grass was like a velvet carpet and deadened his footsteps; the sun's rays pierced their way through the trees on one side, thus making the opposite side of the glade bright with light while the rest of the open space was in the shadow.

He walked in this shady part, and had traversed half its width when he stopped just in time to prevent his treading on a pair of small feet incased in dainty boots.

"I beg your pardon!" he cried, making a little spring aside to avoid stumbling. "I was deep in thought, or I—Oh, I am glad it is not a stranger of whom I have to crave forgiveness, Miss Alleyne; it is so much easier to apologise to one with whom you are acquainted, and it doesn't make you feel half so foolish!"

He was quite at home in ladies' society, and the speech amused Miss Alleyne, that was evident. Somehow, she did not feel that she was below him in station—at any rate, she gave no signs of it, but replied quite easily as she sprang quickly to her feet.

"I am afraid it is my fault, Mr. Blackhurst. I was in the

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way; I ought to have taken up a more retired position; but I really didn't think of anyone coming through here."

"It would be quite wrong for you to think of occupying a more retired position," he declared gallantly, bowing to her as he spoke.

There was a significance in his tone which did not escape her notice, and just the least trace of colour appeared on her cheeks. Ronald could not have resisted the impulse to say it; she looked so charming as she stood before him that he uttered the words because they expressed the truth. It was not right that such a woman as Miss Alleyne should occupy the post of a dependent.

Edith Alleyne was about to make some confused response to Ronald's observation when he, remembering that he had placed her in a difficult situation, broke in:

"Pray do not let me disturb you. I should be exceedingly sorry to think that I had deprived you of rest and pleasure."

"Oh, I must get back to the Lodge now, Mr. Blackhurst," said Miss Alleyne deprecatingly. "You have not disturbed me at all."

"You are going back to the Lodge? Then we can go together, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that if you have lost some pleasure by not being able to continue your book, you are affording me the pleasure of having someone to walk back with and keep me from further indulgence in gloomy thoughts."

Why was it that these gallant speeches would rise to his lips? He was powerless to explain it; they were perfectly sincere.

He glanced sideways, to see how Miss Alleyne took it, and he caught her doing the same thing—she wished to ascertain if he were really sincere or simply jesting. They were so nicely caught in the act that they both laughed—just a trifle awkwardly, perhaps, and felt drawn nearer to one another by a subtle sentiment which neither could define.

He stopped just in time to prevent his treading on a pair of small feet incased in dainty boots.

"Are you really troubled about something, Mr. Blackhurst?" inquired Edith sympathetically. The remembrance of her own troubles made her immediately desire to help others. "Is it anything about the party to-morrow? Can I be of any assistance to you?"

He remained silent for several seconds; at the end of the pause he shook his head slowly and said:

"I wish you could!"

He said it so fervently that she was impelled to break in eagerly:

"Who knows? Perhaps I can. Will you tell me? One sometimes gets assistance where one least expects it."

How simply, how naturally, had this conversation come about! Yet it was leading these two, unconsciously, into the very path against which Lady Blackhurst had warned her son.

They were walking side by side; in her eagerness to help him she had bent her head slightly, and was looking at him with an appealing kind of glance. She had forgotten that they were man and woman, that he was the son of Lady Blackhurst, to whom she was acting as companion; the inherent goodness of her nature came uppermost, and other considerations were lost sight of.

Ronald Blackhurst gazed at her longingly; it would be a relief to tell somebody, yet——. Again that impulse seized him.

"I've been making a fool of myself, that's about the truth of it, Miss Alleyne!" he jerked out recklessly. "I've done it before, in the same way, and I ought to have known better. You see, I've been card playing, and have lost! The last time I ran into debt through losing at cards Sir Walter paid up like a Briton, and I was so ashamed that I said I wouldn't get let in again.

"Well, the night before last I began to play and I won—won a great deal! I suppose that excited me, and I went on playing and lost! I had the most infernal luck, and before I could realise it I had lost a considerable amount.

"I didn't know exactly how much till yesterday morning, and this morning the fellow has pressed me for the money. He wants it to pay his own debts! So I suppose I must go to Sir Walter again, as he can't wait long!

"But," he continued, his bronzed cheeks becoming much darker as he flushed under the tan, "I have a suspicion that the fellow didn't play fair! In plain language, he cheated. What's the matter, Miss Alleyne?"

She had uttered a slight cry.

"Oh, nothing! Go on!"

"Of course, I can't say that out loud, you know, because I'm not positive, but I recollect several things that looked queer."

"Who was it?"

"Well, I don't think I ought to say that," he said chivalrously. "I can't prove it, you see, and it isn't fair to blacken a man on suspicion."

The words that were upon Edith's lips died away unuttered as she saw the soldierly figure of Sir Walter approaching them from the direction of the Lodge. She knew that he would not approve of what he saw, and she flushed at the thought that she had been talking to Ronald in quite a sisterly manner.

Sisterly? The query rose in her mind involuntarily; was

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that the correct qualification, or was a stronger word justified? She dared not answer the question fairly, even in the recesses of her heart, but something within her cried out in anguish against the dictates of Fate!

Sir Walter bowed gravely and detained his son; Miss Alleyne returned the salute and passed on. During the finish of the walk to the Lodge she resolved to avoid Ronald as much as possible. "It will not do," she murmured, as if in answer to some question. "It cannot be!"

Whatever Edith intended to do, it was clearly not Ronald's desire to leave her to herself; that short conversation, the companion's sympathetic interest in his troubles, the charm of that grave face—all had exercised a powerful influence over him. "That's the sort of woman who would be a man's guardian angel!" he muttered, hardly understanding the significance of his words. "That is, if he had sense enough to recognise the fact!"

So he seized every opportunity of speaking to Edith, and even made opportunities of having a short walk with her. Edith perceived this and tried to avoid him, although her heart cried out in rebellion. Yet she knew that it must be!

"Miss Alleyne!" he called after her, softly, four or five days later, as she flitted through the private garden. "Ah, at last I have caught you! I have so wanted to tell you—er—the finish of what I began to say the other day. But you're always in such a hurry to get out of my way. Now, why is that? Why do——"

"I hope that the solution of the difficulty was easily found, Mr. Blackhurst!" she said quickly, interrupting him in order to escape from his awkward interrogatory.

But she was not so fortunate; her words gave him another opening.

"I am glad to find that you really do hope that I got well out of that pickle, Miss Alleyne!" he cried, taking her hand in spite of her attempt to prevent him. "I know you would not say 'I hope' if you didn't care a rap! You wouldn't say that in a commonplace manner, like others! Would you?

"Yes, I got out of it. Captain Joyce lent me the money; I simply couldn't face my father! Joyce wouldn't take any promissory note or anything of that; he merely accepted my word of honour that I would repay it and that I wouldn't play again! That kind of thing puts a man on his mettle, you know!"

"I should think so!" replied Edith. She spoke with conviction and her voice was full of significance. "If you failed, in either part of the promise, your conduct would be despicable!"

She looked him straight in the eyes with that look that makes a man stiffen himself and feel possessed of a will of iron.

"You are right, Miss Alleyne!" he cried with quiet decision. "Do you know what I saw when I gave my word of honour to my father's old friend and my godfather, Captain Joyce? I saw your face! I thought how easy it would be to do the right thing always if I had that face to look upon when—— No, don't turn away! Listen to me, Edith!"

"I cannot! I must not!" she moaned. "Oh, spare me! You know that—that I am only your mother's companion!"

The last part of that sentence was not what she had upon her lips to say, but she swiftly changed it. How could she tell him?

"I don't care for your position; it is you for whom I care!" he cried, almost fiercely, as he tried to clasp her to his breast. "If you love me, what does all the rest matter? And you do love me, do you not?" he asked pleadingly.

She shut her eyes to avoid his ardent gaze and, by a sudden twist of her arms, she liberated herself from his grasp and fled towards the house. Her face was hot, a great sob was in her throat, her mind was in a whirl. He gazed after her with an exultant expression; her confusion was his answer, and that answer was the one he desired, so he thought!

That afternoon Ronald announced that he had made arrangements to shorten his holiday in Scotland by one week in order to have another week at home; his parents misunderstood the reason of this change, and were glad that Ronald preferred home to Scotland.

He saw Edith Alleyne lying, unresistingly, in the arms of Lord Gransdene.

He tried to obtain another interview with Edith, but failed. She was suffering from a violent headache and could not appear. He caught a glimpse of her on the following morning, but everyone, including himself, was busy with the details of the party to be given in the evening.

It was a brilliant function, and Ronald's one regret was that Edith could not take her place with the guests. "Not yet," he thought. "But she will do so before long!" On the whole, however, he was inclined to be pleased with her exclusion on that particular evening; it would probably afford him an opportunity of seeing her alone! He could well slip away for a few minutes!

Ronald Blackhurst's face darkened with anger when his eyes fell on the figure of one of the guests; it was Lord Gransdene, the man to whom he had lost so much money and whom he had practically accused of cheating at cards.

Lord Gransdene had succeeded to the title only a year previously, owing to the unexpected deaths of his father and elder brother, who were drowned by the capsizing of a yacht; nobody had known much about him previously, and it was rumoured that he had been roughing it in the Colonies.

One thing at least was certain; he had very little money to support the title, for there was no estate and the personal property of his father had been left to another brother and a sister. This fact was regarded by most people as an injustice; the young lord had probably offended his father in some trivial way, they said.

"I didn't know that the mater had invited him!" muttered Ronald. "I thought he went off the other day; he must have returned and received an invitation at the last moment, somehow. Confound him!"

However, Ronald soon got over his annoyance by ignoring Lord Gransdene's presence; he was watching for an opportunity to look for Edith, and that made him occasionally absent-minded, to the surprise and vexation of some of the young ladies.

At last the opportunity came and he slipped away. He

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hurried hither and thither in search of Edith—he always called her Edith to himself now! His search appeared fruitless, and he gnawed the ends of his military moustache in annoyance.

She must be about somewhere! He must have just one minute with her! It was maddening to be kept apart from the woman with whom he had fallen so hopelessly in love!

He was about to enter a part of the conservatory when that subtle feeling which warns us of the presence of a fellow-creature caused him to halt and peer in. He started in dismay at the sight which met his incredulous gaze. He saw Edith Alleyne lying, unresisting, in the arms of Lord Gransdene, who was kissing her passionately.

Stunned by this spectacle, Ronald's sight failed him, a mist spread itself before his eyes, he raised his hand to his forehead and staggered away with the word "Traitress!" on his lips.

Ronald made his way mechanically back to the immense reception room; all the way he was muttering scornfully that he had been deceived into believing that a false-hearted woman was an angel of goodness; and then he plunged into the vortex of pleasure with reckless gaiety.

Ronald's first impulse, when he arose with a splitting headache on the morning after the party, was to leave Blackhurst Lodge at the earliest moment; he began packing his things with feverish haste, his one anxiety being to get away from Edith Alleyne, but he stopped abruptly in the middle of his task, set his teeth hard and strode from the room.

"Why should I not face her and tell her how she has ruined my life and my trust in women?" he asked himself again and again as he descended the stairs.

He made no scruple about inquiring for her, and was informed that she was in the private garden. "The same place! All the better!" was his secret comment, and he went straight to the garden.

Yes, she was there! She looked rather more careworn than before, but he had no pity for her!

"I am so glad that I have seen you!" she cried, hastening towards him. "I wanted to tell you——"

Something in his look froze the sentence on her tongue.

"I need no telling, Miss Alleyne!" he broke in, speaking with bitter contempt. "What need for explanation when I see you in the arms of another man?"

She recled as if he had struck her a blow. He laughed harshly.

"Yet an explanation is due to me, I think!" he continued with assumed coolness. "After what took place here, at this very spot, only forty-eight hours ago, I ought to be informed of the reason for this perfidy!"

"Be it so!" she replied coldly. Every vestige of colour had faded from her face; even her lips were white. "I will tell you! But first permit me to say that you will receive this morning a cheque from Lord Gransdene for the money you lost at cards the other evening—through his cheating!"

"What do you mean?" he demanded in amazement.

"I am about to give you the explanation of my perfidy!" she replied so coldly that he winced. "I would fain have been spared this story, but you force me to it!

"When I was a mere girl of eighteen, that is nearly six years ago, I was forced into a marriage with a man for whom I entertained not a spark of affection. I was told that my father owed him money and that this was the way to liquidate the debt. It is not an uncommon way; women are often sold into slavery of that nature!

"I was too young to understand; it was a new life that I was about to begin, and the old one had been very sad and dull! I was to be married to the second son of Lord Gransdene, and there was the remote possibility of becoming a peeress!

"But before I had been married many months, I learnt that the man to whom I was bound was a scoundrel. He was bad at heart, a gambler, a cheat! To save him from exposure and disgrace, his father paid a large sum of money and told him to get out of the country. He did not ask me, his wife, to go with him; I would not have gone, in any case, but he gave me no choice—he simply deserted me!

"I refused help from his father, who thought that I had brought him to that pass by reckless extravagance—yes, he thought that, although he knew absolutely nothing about me! My father died of a broken heart and I obtained a situation and earned my living.

"I heard that my husband had come into the title and had returned to England. I fervently hoped that I should never meet him, for I loathed him. Judge of my distress when I found that he was here!

"He met me in the conservatory, recognised me, threatened to tell everybody that I was his wife, and to claim me. He caught hold of me, and I think that I partly fainted. I suppose that you saw me then!

"I recovered and fought him with his own weapons. I told him that I would expose him as a cheat if he molested me, and I boldly accused him of cheating you! I saw that I had hit the mark, and I pressed it till he promised to leave me unmolested and to send you a cheque for the money.

"You spoke of what happened on this very spot two days ago. Heavens, you did not, you do not, understand!"

She ceased speaking; her breath was coming in quick gasps, her whole frame quivered. They looked each other in the eyes, and he understood! He read the secret which she dare not utter, which she had tried to conceal. He knew that, for the first time in her life, she loved and that he was the object of that love! And he knew also that she could not yield to her affection, that Fate compelled her to stifle it!

"I am sorry for my harshness!" he said gently, so gently that she could scarcely endure it. "I was wrong! It was all my fault! Can you forgive me?"

She held out her hand and he kissed it reverently.

"I am going away," he said a moment later, "but I hope that my mother will sometimes send me news of you! He will leave the country, no one will know, so you can remain here?"

"I must tell Lady Blackhurst," she answered, "and perhaps she will not let me stay."

"Yes, she will!" he declared decisively. "She is strict, but she is very good, and she will be kind to one to whom Fate has been so cruel! Good-bye!"

H. Bramley.

"Mrs. Gobang seems to be thoroughly up to date." "Yes; she even has a smokeless husband."

"Did you get back that half-sovereign your little boy swallowed?" "No; the doctor stuck to it for his fee."

"He has broken my heart," wailed the beautiful girl. "There, there! don't take on so," said her friend, in tones of pity; "it might have been your bicycle."

Freddie: "It's always in damp places where mushrooms grow, isn't it, papa?" Papa: "Yes, my boy." Freddie: "Is that the reason they look like umbrellas, papa?"

"There was a strange man here to see you to-day, papa," said little Ethel, who met her father in the hall as he came home on Wednesday night. "Did he have a bill?" "No, papa. He had just a plain nose."

A SPLEND'D SERIAL STORY,

By Mrs. GEORGE CORBETT,

Begins in the September Number of the

LADY'S MAGAZINE,

and should on no account be missed. The story teems with interest, and is written in the Authoress' most attractive style. . . .

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AN OLD TUNE.

A Love Story with a Pathetic Ending.

LEWIS MILWARD and Willie Tregloan had been bosom friends for years — at least, Willie had been Lewis' bosom friend. His was the more clinging nature, and he had an intensely strong sense of gratitude. Lewis, big, rugged, reticent, was a tower of strength unto himself—or seemed to be so.

They had rooms together in a "private temperance hotel" in one of the big, old-fashioned squares. Lewis was a profound mathematical scholar, and Willie performed the duties of secretary for him.

They were middle-aged, and seemed almost elderly because their lives had been saddened and made lonely. Long ago Lewis had loved a girl, very fair, very beautiful; and he had lost her—not through death. There are other ways, more painful; and beautiful women there are, who prefer a handsome man, or a rich one, to the truest gentleman on earth.

Willie's case was sad, too, in other ways.

Sick at heart they had shrunk from the world and buried themselves in books and work, living the lives of hermits and, unconsciously, putting halos round their early memories. They did not observe that Time and Life were slipping by them, because, naturally, they had grown a little self-centred.

Lewis expended all his energies on mathematical studies and Willie devoted himself to Lewis. When Lewis did not want him he painted—for he was an artist of no feeble order; but Lewis' desires were his law, and the fulfilling of them was his pleasure.

He did not forget how, when one awful day, ten years ago, a bank smash had completely ruined him, Lewis, the only friend who had ever protested his goodwill, had provided all for him, asking never a single question.

In return, he gave all of himself—and it was much.

They did not either of them realise, yet, what or how much was lacking in their studious lives. Their days were absorbed in a monotonous round of books and works.

In the evening they went downstairs to have dinner with the other people, presided over by Mrs. Parry, the stout and cheerful mistress of the house. All this had become a routine.

Every day they were shrinking more and more into themselves, and even the evening meal downstairs was becoming irksome to Lewis. Willie endured it better, because he did not dislike new faces, and because his was a gentler spirit.

But Lewis hated them all. They seemed to him—but he judged them from a point of view made painfully, aesthetically fastidious by his mode of life and thought—smug, commonplace, vulgar, and he began to talk of having dinner served up to him. Willie thought it a pity—but, of course, just as Lewis wished!

"There was fresh luggage in the hall as I came up," he added. "New people, I suppose. Let's go down to-night, anyway, and see them——" He was a social soul by nature.

"New people!" exclaimed Lewis in dismay. "No; I'll be hanged if I will. More fat, stupid old spinsters, or American tourists, I suppose!"

"I didn't see them," replied Willie mildly. "But they mostly are."

Lewis snorted in disgust and re-lighted his pipe.

"I'm going down to read Byron in the Square. It's too hot to write. Will you come?"

"No, thanks," said Willie. "I think I'll just finish a few verses I began yesterday. I feel in the mood. I shall be here if you want me."

Lewis picked up his old straw hat and book, procured the key, and went out to the garden—known as the "Square."

As he seated himself under a shady tree, he saw a lady emerge from the house, wherein at present was his home, and wend her way into the garden. She followed the path near him and he watched her idly.

She was young, quite young, and tall and slender, and passing fair. There was a sort of radiance about her, a something which surprised and dazzled you. You felt you wanted to rub your eyes before you looked again, in case they had deceived you.

She had gone by before he could distinguish more than that, and she seated herself too far off for him to see her without putting up his eye-glass; for he was very short-sighted. He speculated about her, wondering at himself; then tried to read. But Byron failed for once to hold his attention.

He would persist in wondering if the girl were really as radiant as she had seemed as she passed. And what was it, this indescribable something? It was like sunshine of June, but infinitely more so—more—he laughed to himself, suddenly self-conscious.

"What a fool I am!" he reflected. "Just because the sun shone as she went by, I must needs think she caused the brightness;" and he returned to his Byron.

Only for a second. Then, as though impelled, he looked across again to where the fair unknown was sitting.

"I don't believe it was *all* the sunshine," he mused. "It couldn't have been. No, I'm positive it wasn't. I'm——" He jumped up, as one who makes a bold and desperate resolve. "I'm going to walk over there and see." And with courage most wonderful, he rose and went over the Square towards her. The girl was reading and her face hidden. He was seized with a sudden irresistible desire to make her look up, and to hear her speak.

"Excuse me," he said, taking off his hat. "Here—er—here is the key of the Square. I am going out and you will want it to let yourself out with, you see."

The girl had looked up at the sound of his voice, and he met her frank blue eyes. "Oh, thank you," she said. Her voice was like music.

He stared at her fair face for a second, as one bewitched. She had shining eyes, shining hair, a smile of wonderful sweetness; and the glow of youth and the gladness of an untroubled soul were about her.

Then, suddenly realising his own astonishing temerity, he bowed awkwardly and turned away; for no apparent reason, covered with confusion.

"And I called her a fat old spinster!" he said to himself. "She is a summer's day."

The girl looked after him for a vague second.

"That must be the taciturn mathematician," she reflected. "He looks it."

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Mrs. Parry, the mistress of the house, had told her of him when she came to look at the rooms.

Lewis went down to dinner that night!

Willie was rather relieved. When he found himself seated next to a slip of a girl dressed in a frivolous-looking white dress he was positively glad.

Lewis sat opposite to her—and was rather annoyed with Willie for having the courage to make use of a graceful manner.

He himself was somewhat brusque of speech, and jerky of movement, out of pure shyness.

They learnt that the unknown's name was Daphne Rivers, and that she was up in London for a six weeks' rehearsal.

An actress! Lewis opened his eyes wide. He had never met "theatrical people," and he had a notion that he wouldn't like them if he did.

Daphne had never met a mathematical scholar before. She had felt sure she couldn't live up to one, especially one so serious and middle-aged. She told him so—all except the "middle-aged" part. She remembered just in time that he might not like that.

He found himself laughing with her, listening to her, and forgetting himself. He even ventured on a very pretty speech in reply to a remark she made, and got through it so successfully that he chose that moment to tear himself away from the room, feeling sure he would only spoil it, and make an utter ass of himself, if he tempted Providence any longer.

So he and Willie went back to work upstairs, both silent, still under the spell of the newcomer's unconscious witchery. Their sitting-room looked grim and dusty—they themselves felt old-fashioned and shabby. Lewis lighted his pipe and smoked thoughtfully. Willie took up his pen and wrote, with a scratching nib.

Presently from the room beneath, a young, clear voice floated up to them in the stillness. A strange thrill vibrated through them and the scratching pen stopped. Daphne was singing an Irish folk-song downstairs. They had never heard it before—nor heard, indeed, any music for long enough—and they only knew Beethoven and Mozart, and had always despised the modern stuff; at least, Lewis had.

At the end of the first verse he took his pipe out of his mouth and got up and stared out of the open window, his morbid face alight. The pen fell from Willie's fingers, blotting the white sheet before him, and his mind travelled back to old, old dreams. They listened spell-bound to the second verse.

Then the singing ceased, but the silence upstairs remained unbroken.

They had both begun to realise now what they had missed in life.

Daphne soon became very friendly with Lewis and Willie. To cheer her quite imaginary loneliness they offered her books to read, and philanthropically devised what amusements they could which would give them an opportunity of being with her.

Right royally they waited upon her, and the summer days went by merrily.

Their work suffered, naturally. For, even when she was at the theatre, and they knew they could settle to work without running any risk of missing a chance of seeing her, they found themselves talking of her or thinking of her.

If she walked in the Square, they suddenly found their room too oppressive for work—that is, if Daphne walked alone in the Square. But she was very popular. Even the "fat old spinsters" liked her. And there were no young ones there!

She seemed to have wakened up the dull old boarding-house and filled it with the spirit of youth, and daily the delight of her presence and companionship deepened to two at least of the inmates. Mrs. Parry marvelled! Where was Mr. Milward's taciturnity? For Lewis, growing bolder, asked Daphne to allow him to be her guide in exploring London, and they spent various glorious afternoons and evenings—at least, to Lewis they were glorious.

Those summer hours with her, talking to her of his work or waxing eloquent over his favourite authors, or favourite themes; or listening to her sagely tolerant views, or submitting to her audacious teasing! All these were to him like bright stars in a dark, dark sky—oases in the dreary desert—a raft to a drowning man.

He knew soon, too soon, that he loved her, and craved for her, with all his long-repressed soul and strength, and they were great; although he cheated himself for a while and swore he regarded her as a friend.

And because she had always seemed to be glad to be with him, had always been kind, had allowed him to escort her home from late rehearsals, and take her out on holiday afternoons, he could not resist the hope that she cared a little too, that perhaps she would allow him the privi-

"Excuse me," he said, taking off his hat. "Here is the key of the Square."

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lege of loving her—would be happy with him—would love him.

As for Daphne, she thought them all—and particularly these two serious middle-aged men—most wonderfully kind; and she was very grateful. But so far she had met with kindness everywhere, and she never dreamt that anything more prompted these two, to her, elderly men. Love did not as yet enter into her dreams at all.

Willie was often left alone now in the grim sitting-room, while his friend was out with Daphne. If there was no work to do he made beautiful little sketches, whose subject was a fair maiden with bright hair and smiling lips, and the radiance of youth.

"Daphne!" he murmured, writing the name at the foot of one of them. "She should have been called 'Psyche.'"

He started guiltily and blushed; but presently fell to musing again, and conjured up in dreams a very different life from this, in a different groove; a life in which there figured a sweet little country house, and peaceful happiness, and no more dulness, because his lifelong companion would be a—wife, who was—his eyes fell on the sonnets and the sketch called—"Daphne."

Daphne! Daphne for his wife! Oh, merciful God, might it be? For he loved her—loved her! He started up, calling himself a fool. Had he forgotten his age, his poverty, his dependence on Lewis? And yet—and yet!

He tried to crush the thought, but it would return—the thought that Lewis, who had always been his salvation, might help once again. He would tell him, anyhow. He felt that he ought to have Lewis' sanction. Perhaps he guessed something even now—perhaps Daphne did!

His heart throbbed painfully—but when Lewis came in he had not the courage to tell him; and Lewis was not helpful, but wandered about restlessly, his hands in his pockets, humming occasional snatches of songs—not Beethoven's nor yet Mozart's! It struck him that Willie was getting intolerably dull lately.

Willie marvelled that even Lewis' voice could sound unmusical, singing those particular songs. It seemed to him a pity that Lewis should spoil them so.

The next evening Daphne was walking in the Square with them. It was sultry—and they had seen from their window the flutter of a white dress among the trees. That was what made the evening sultry to them!

"Why don't you smoke, you poor martyrs?" demanded she, for she knew they were inveterate smokers. "You must be miserable. Do!".

They declined gracefully.

"But I don't mind, you know," she protested. "I smoke myself, so why should I?"

Lewis stared.

"You—you smoke!" he ejaculated.

"Of course!"

"What—er——"

"Oh, only cigarettes yet," she said laughing. "Why, I do believe you are shocked."

He was, but he was thinking, too, how charming she must look.

"A—a little, perhaps," he said bashfully. Then hastened to add: "But—I am old-fashioned, I know."

She was amused.

"Well, I shall not interfere with your pleasures, or let you waste your time on me much longer," she said.

"You have never done either," he muttered awkwardly. "But what do you mean, Miss Rivers?"

"That we go on tour next Sunday," she said, and sighed regretfully.

He caught his breath.

"That means—out of London?" he asked.

"Of course. The north country towns."

"And you go on Sunday?"

"Yes, alas."

It was a thunderbolt.

She wondered a little at their silence. But the night was still and beautiful, and her thoughts were very pleasant, so she did not break it. Willie stole away with never a word, so desperately miserable he was; and Lewis stared at her aghast.

They had forgotten that she was only there for a season, that soon she would go away, and be swallowed up in the rushing world, and come back to them never more. She had become the sunny part of their days, and they could scarcely realise that they must lose her, and go back to their old monotonous routine. It was too horrible.

But all that Lewis said as he twisted his new straw hat between his fingers was:

"I—I am beastly sorry, Miss Rivers. I can't tell you how sorry."

"So am I," she returned frankly. "It has been awfully jolly here in London. And you've all been so kind."

"Oh, please don't say that," he said quickly. "It has been such a pleasure to know you. The kindness has been yours. I—I want to—tell you——"

"Supper's ready," called Mrs. Parry's cheerful voice, coming to them. "Didn't you hear the bell?"

Lewis reviled the bell under his breath with much sincerity and conviction.

"Let me see you to-morrow evening, will you?" he pleaded. hastily.

"Of course, if you like," she answered; and Mrs. Parry was upon them, so they went into the house together.

Willie did not appear at all.

Lewis paced his room that night, maddened by love, hope, fear.

Should he speak, putting aside all thought of his age and disadvantages? Or should he see her go out of his ken, and resume the old life, that was only a living death?

The thought was unendurable. It was like shutting oneself deliberately outside the gates of Eden, and throwing away the key. And surely she guessed.

Surely she knew what he felt for her, what he wanted to say to her! And knowing, would she have been so kind unless—unless—he picked up his hat, and stole out into the Square to think it all out again, and there he came upon Willie, who had spent the hours in arguing out the same problem from a different point of view.

"Hullo, Willie!"

"Hullo, Lewis!"

Strangely enough they were rather pleased to see each other at that moment. Lewis took Willie's arm, and they walked to and fro silently. Then Willie made a desperate effort to confide in Lewis and ask his help.

Just then Lewis burst forth:

"Willie—I want your advice."

This was rather a novel statement coming from Lewis, and Willie was pleased as well as surprised.

"Say on," quoth he.

"You—you'll think me an awful ass," went on Lewis. "But—but the fact is, I—I've fallen head over ears in love. Do you think—I've got the ghost of a chance?"

He was too full of his subject to notice Willie's sudden start, or the sympathetic shake in his voice as he asked:

"Who's the lady?"

Lewis stared at him.

"You mean to say you've never guessed? Why, Miss Rivers, of course."

Miss Rivers, of course! Willie was dazed for a second. Then he could have laughed aloud at the mockery of it. Here, poor fool, he had been fancying that he was the only man in the field! As if a girl would look at him, in any case! And with Lewis to compete—Lewis, whom he would not, could not compete with. Oh, Lord, oh, Lord, in what a fool's dream he had been living!

"What do you think, Willie?" Lewis recalled his thoughts. "Will she—have I—do you think she'll have me? You know she talks of going away—but it's too horrible—I—I can't go back to the old way——"

Willie swallowed a great lump in his throat. Never again would he be sufficient to his friend, in spite of these years of devoted friendship. It seemed unfair. He had always had a share in Lewis' thoughts as in his life—now even that would be

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his no longer. He would be unnecessary, useless. That is terrible.

"I think you stand a good chance," he said quite steadily. "I can't imagine any woman — refusing you, Lewis."

"She's so young, so beautiful. I'm old—ugly——"

"You're only middle-aged, Lewis. Many young girls marry men your age—and at any rate, you're a gentleman."

He ignored the personal reference. Not even Willie could call Lewis an Adonis.

"I shall speak to-morrow," said Lewis. "She goes on Sunday. I may see her to-morrow evening."

"That looks promising. And—and I wish you all luck, Lewis. You deserve it, Heaven knows!"

He held out his hand, and Lewis grasped it.

"Thank you, Willie."

And he spared a second to wonder vaguely how he could ever have thought Willie a bit—well, a bit dull! He was splendid, just splendid.

He did not dream of what Willie suffered, or that when he left him and went to his room he took out a little revolver and handled it lovingly, longingly passionately to slip out of life; and was only arrested from so doing by the thought that it was caddish to spoil their happiness, even ever so little; and also vaguely, that some day, perhaps—who knows, Lewis might have some small need of him again.

But the next morning he went out very early, with his paints and easel. It was more than could be asked of human nature, to stand by, watching passively, the sacrifice of one's dearest hopes.

To Lewis that day was an ordeal. Sometimes it seemed that a hundred years were dragging their weary length before the hour that he lived for; and then Time would seem to be rushing him on madly to his undoing. He wandered about restlessly, hot and cold by turns, though the day was brilliant summer.

At last the hour drew near when she would be in, and presently he heard her singing softly downstairs. He looked at himself in the glass, and for the first time in his life wished himself twenty years younger, and a less awkward height.

He went downstairs and opened the door quietly. She stopped singing, and turned to him with a smile which gladdened his heart, and raised his hopes.

"Don't stop, please," he pleaded. "I want to listen."

She declined, apologising.

"I was only strumming to amuse myself. I'm not in the humour to perform."

"What are you in the humour for?" he asked.

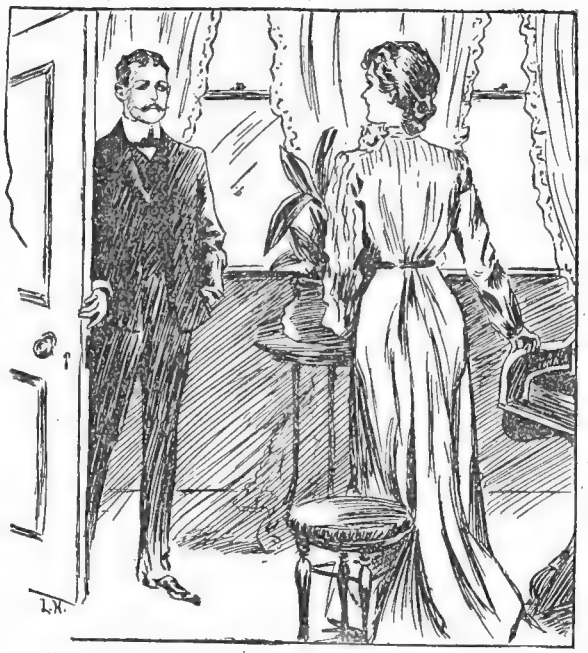
"I don't quite know. Something exciting—something terribly nice, don't you know! My language shocks you, I'm afraid."

"Allow me to take you somewhere 'terribly nice,'" he said.

"No, thanks. You would spoil me if I allowed you. But isn't it a beautiful evening?"

She left the piano and moved to the open window. He noticed her long green dress, the pink roses in her belt, and the grace of her movements.

"Then let me take you out," he pleaded. "It's your last evening, you know."



"Don't stop, please," he pleaded. "I want to listen."

She shook her head. She had never allowed them to spend money on her. Lewis had noticed that, often.

"You are very proud," he said slowly.

"Oh, it isn't pride. Don't think that," she said.

"What then?"

She raised her shoulders slightly.

"I don't know—but——" she reflected, "I suppose I like my independence. I delight in earning my own living, and I like to—to pay my own way. Men have a stupid notion that they must pay for women. To me, that spoils friendship."

He looked at her with a great light in his honest eyes. Had she been noticing him, she might have guessed what was at hand. But she stared through the window absently.

"Underneath your irresponsible manner," he said thoughtfully, "there is a depth of soul that I don't believe you dream of."

She was taken aback, and blamed her own serious speech, as having brought this on herself.

"That is a pretty speech, with a kink in it," she said.

"It is not a pretty speech," he returned. "But where is the kink?"

"You accuse me of an irresponsible manner——"

"That is one of your thousand attractions."

She plucked at some ribbon on her sleeve.

"Forgive me," she said. "But I don't like compliments."

"You are annoyed," he apologised humbly. "I am so sorry—I——"

"No, no." She raised her eyes to his face. "No. But I really do get so many at the theatre. And they seem meaningless, and—I am bored with them."

So they made her pretty speeches at the theatre! That side of her life had never occurred to him. They wooed her, too, no doubt! It was a wonder she was still free to be courted! His jealousy flamed.

"It is a horrible life for you," he exclaimed. "Their unwelcome attentions, and the late hours, and——"

"Oh, every life has its disadvantages," she said. "You must not think I am complaining. I like the life immensely—that is," she laughed, "all except the packing. That's terrible, and now I'm afraid I must go and do it, alack!"

She moved to go, but he took her hand quickly.

"No; don't pack," he said. "Don't—don't go."

She looked at him.

"I must, I'm afraid. We leave by an early train to-morrow——"

"Don't go to-morrow—don't go at all——"

She glanced at him puzzledly, and freed her hand.

"I don't quite understand you," she said.

"I want you," he went on passionately, his earnest face alight and eager. "I love you—I have loved you from the first moment. The thought of your leaving me is—is—terrible—intolerable. You have made these weeks like a perfect dream. Daphne, will you go on making my life a dream? Will you stay with me—will you marry me? It is asking so much, I know, I am such a clumsy ass, and so—so old to you. But I will devote my life to making you happy."

Daphne did not speak. She was aghast, amazed. She had not dreamed of this. The whole thing seemed impossible,

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impossible—ludicrous indeed, but for his passionate earnestness.

"You knew a little, you guessed a little, didn't you?" he went on. "Is it wrong to ask you? I love you so."

"I—I am sorry," she said, her head bent. "Really, really, I didn't know."

"But you know now," he cried, grasping her hands in his. "Daphne, tell me, I may hope. I'll wait, if you like. Don't answer me till you wish. I—I have surprised you. Only tell me I may hope—look at me, Daphne, speak to me."

She looked up at him, and was stricken with remorse and shame that so strong and noble a soul should be abased by a refusal.

"I cannot," she whispered, "I cannot."

"Ah, you don't mean that quite," he pleaded. "Don't send me away without a chance. I won't bother you. I'll wait so patiently."

Alack for him! She knew that neither patience nor time would give him what he asked for.

"I am to blame," she said brokenly. "I have been so blind, so stupid. I might have spared you all this, and now you will think me cruel. But it is impossible—utterly impossible. I looked on you only as a friend. But, oh, I am so sorry, so bitterly sorry."

He looked into her face and read pity there. It spoke more than her words. It was like a knife at his heart.

"Daphne," he said, with white lips, "Daphne, is it hopeless?"

Her eyes filled with tears as she looked at him. Then she covered her face with her hands.

Lewis went out quietly and closed the door.

* * * * *

Willie, returning very late, entered their common sitting-room to put down his paint-box. He struck a match, and found Lewis sitting motionless by the table, his face buried in his arms. Beside him lay a small study of a girl's face. He felt as one who breaks in upon a secret prayer; but, as he turned quietly to go, Lewis looked up, as one in a dream.

The moonlight showed a rigid, haggard face.

"Don't go, Willie," he said. "If you're not tired let's go out on the balcony and smoke. I want you."

So they picked up the threads of their old life and Willie was still a necessity.

Gertrude Bibby.

Viola: "I've just finished a unique sofa-pillow. It's stuffed with old love-letters." Mabel: "Indeed! How very nice and soft it must be."

Fair Customer: "Are you quite sure this is a genuine four-leaf clover?" Dealer: "I could swear to it, lady. I put the extra leaf on myself."

"Will you lend me your lawn-mower for an hour or so?" "I can't do it, but if you like, you may keep that snow shovel you borrowed last January a little longer."

Teacher: "Johnny, surely you know what 'osculate' means? What do people do when they are in love?" Johnny (the jeweller's hopeful): "They come to pa for an engagement-ring!"

"Going to the same place for the summer this year?" "Yes. Last year all my girls brought husbands home from there, and I'm in hopes that they'll take 'em back and leave me there again this year."

"My dear," said Mrs. Hunwell, as she poured out coffee at breakfast the other morning, "do you believe in the eternal fitness of things?" "I used to," replied Hunwell, "but that was before you began to make my shirts."

"Father ill and can't work! Tut, tut! That's a very serious matter for all of you, my little man." "Yessir, but it might have been wuss." "Worse! Why, he's the breadwinner, isn't he?" "Yessir, but it might have been mother, and she buys the tea an' clothes an' sugar an' milk an' meat."

Your Editor Chats.

I am wondering how my readers liked the innovation in covers which took place last week. Of course I am pleased with it myself, otherwise I should not have made the change, and I shall be glad to have opinions from readers whether they like it or not.

It is some weeks since the last tartan cover was published but another one is coming along in two weeks' time—the Clan Macquarrie. Any of you who have Scottish friends who are not readers of *Short Stories* should tell them what is coming. A list of the reproductions of tartans which have already appeared, together with the date of their appearance, will be published in *Short Stories* for September 19, the number with the Clan Macquarrie cover.

Again I must make my apologies for not yet being able to publish the result of the Buried Stations Competition. Some readers have written asking whether it is going to be published at all. This will most certainly be done. The delay is occasioned owing to the great amount of time entailed in the checking of the attempts, and as this is holiday time the number of checkers is necessarily curtailed. However, readers may rest assured that they shall know the result at the earliest possible moment.

On another page you will notice an announcement concerning the publication of a new paper called *The Boys' Leader*. This, as the name implies, will appeal more especially to the youths of the land. Mr. Henry T. Johnson, the author of our serial, is contributing a continued stirring historical story to this new paper, which will be published on September 8. Any parent who has sons whom they wish to provide with bright healthy reading will do well to become a subscriber to *The Boys' Leader*—it costs one penny each week.

I shall not be able to make many more appeals this summer for the Fresh Air Fund as the time for holding the excursions will be over with the advent of shorter days and long, chilly evenings. However, among the children of our large cities there are still many faces which need to be made happy.

Though this summer has not, on the whole, been a hot one, those in fairly good circumstances who have not yet had the opportunity of leaving the town in which they live, will be glad when they are able to do so. They have found their surroundings uncongenial enough. What must it be then for the slum dwellers?

Go then to the nearest post-office and procure a postal order or some stamps and send them along to the Hon. Sec., Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. They will be acknowledged in *Pearson's Weekly*. Ninepence pays the entire cost of a day's outing for one child.

Your Editor.

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St. Clement's Wells.

The Story of a Visit and the Happiness it Brought.

"I DON'T *want* to go, and I *won't* go," declared Nan rebelliously.

"You will go on Monday, as Lady Thornleigh has arranged," said her step-mother in tones of authority.

Nan made no answer in words, but she pouted, tossed her head, and looked anything but submissive.

She made a lovely picture as she stood by the open window of the homely, old-fashioned sitting-room. Nan Hayslope was perfectly charming with her golden curls, her big eyes, and her dimpled little face, that looked as though it were made out of blush-roses.

Mrs. Hayslope took some fresh work out of her overflowing basket, and went on quietly sewing.

"You have spent six weeks with your god-mother every summer since you were four years old," she began presently, "and this is the first time you have made any objection to the visit. You must go, my dear, for your father will not allow you to offend Lady Thornleigh."

"It's so deadly dull at St. Clement's Wells," burst out Nan, half crying. "There's no one there but Lady Thornleigh. It was all very well when I was little, but it is quite different now I'm seventeen."

"You'll have to stand it," replied Mrs. Hayslope, and Nan knew she would. She had never known any other mother than this firm, capable woman, who ruled the household, including her wayward step-daughter, with a strong hand.

Nan's own mother had been a poor relation of Lady Thornleigh's family, and had been considered to have done very well for herself when she married the prosperous country doctor. But she died when Nan was four years old, and Lady Thornleigh who had been fond of her poor young cousin, took an interest in the child, invited her every summer to St. Clement's Wells, and made her lavish presents. The childless widow liked the presence of the pretty baby, who brightened up the old house with her frolics, and sweet babbling laughter.

But as Nan outgrew goodies and toys, and was treated with less indulgence than had been shown to the engaging child, she began to find St. Clement's Wells an exceedingly dull place to spend six weeks in, and at last she mutinied outright and declared she would not go.

"I am sure some evil will follow if you make me go, father," she pleaded, hanging coaxingly round his neck. "I have a presentiment it will. I have such a dull, heavy feeling *here*," laying her hand on a spot where she supposed her heart to be.

All Nan's pleading was in vain, and the appointed day and hour saw her arrival at St. Clement's Wells.

"I wanted you for this week particularly," observed Lady Thornleigh, as Nan having changed her dusty travelling gown for a little white frock in which she looked more like a bunch of pink-and-white roses than ever, appeared in her god-mother's drawing-room, and accepted the refreshment of a cup of tea. "My niece Felicitas Dunbar—you've heard me speak of Felicitas?—arrives to-morrow to pay me a long visit, and as I can't go about much myself, I shall want you to be with her, and to try to make her visit as pleasant as possible."

"I'll try," promised Nan dutifully, much pleased at the prospect of a girl companion.

But Miss Dunbar arrived in a very bad temper, having lost every connection she possibly could, and having spent hours at several little country stations.

"Late? *Of course* I'm late," she said, in answer to her aunt's half-reproachful greeting. "This is the most out-of-the-way place in the world, and has the worst train service. I missed the connection at the junction through that *imbecile's* fault," pointing a tragic and grimy finger at her maid, who had obviously been weeping.

When Miss Dunbar had been cleansed, soothed, and supplied with tea, she recovered her temper and smiled blandly on her aunt, and rather less blandly on Nan. She looked, now that she was freed from dust, and no longer frowning, very beautiful.

She was on a large scale, and perfectly proportioned. Her silky black hair was waved and rippled in the latest fashion.

Her clear-cut features were absolutely regular, her face was creamy white, without the faintest tinge of colour except in the lips and in the large dark eyes.

"I hear that Sir Erroll Tremaine has come back to England at last," observed Lady Thornleigh, leisurely sipping her tea. "They say he is expected at Tremaine Towers before long."

"I met him in town," said Felicitas briefly.

"He used to run about St. Clement's Wells like a son of the house, when he was a boy," observed Lady Thornleigh musingly. "But that is fourteen or fifteen years ago. I dare say he has forgotten all that now."

"No, he has not. He asked for you, and said he would call as soon as he got down to his own place. Quite near, is it not?"

"Oh, yes. You see that little gate on the right"—they were taking tea on the terrace—"it leads into a wood, through which a brook runs. On the other side of the stream begin Erroll's grounds."

"He's rich, isn't he?"

"Very; had a long minority too. Oh, he's very wealthy."

They talked on about Sir Erroll, giving Nan the feeling of being present at a drama in a foreign language. There was meaning in every word, but she could not understand it.

However, her eyes were opened when Sir Erroll came down to Tremaine Towers, and called on Lady Thornleigh. Nan kept in the background during his visit, and used her eyes diligently.

"Oh!" she said to the four walls of her own room. "*Now* I understand why Felicitas offered her aunt a visit."

Sir Erroll soon became a tame dog about St. Clement's Wells, and seldom let a day pass without a visit. Lady Thornleigh was well pleased to see his attention to her niece, but, had she been a keener observer, she might have noticed that though he talked most to Felicitas, his eyes dwelt oftenest on the wild-rose face of her little god-child.

"What is the legend of St. Clement's Wells?" asked Nan, perching herself on the broad window ledge, and sitting half in and half out of the library, where Felicitas was writing a letter for her aunt, and Erroll lounging aimlessly about.

"Is there any legend?" he asked, watching the lithe figure swaying backwards and forwards.

"Oh, yes, there is. I've heard it often when I was a child. There are two wells you know, one is in the woods——"

"I pass it every day when I come here," interrupted Erroll. "Is that the one with the legend attached to it?"

Nan nodded her golden head.

"Yes, that's the one. There's something about a girl tumbling into it, and a curse on it. And it's a wishing well, and——"

"I am surprised, Miss Hayslope, that you can repeat such nonsense," said Felicitas severely, as she rose and swept forward with the letter in her hand, but before she had reached the door she had stumbled over a foot-stool, and sank gracefully into Sir Erroll's hastily extended arms.

"Are you hurt?" asked Erroll and Nan almost in the same breath.

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"I've wrenched my ankle," replied Felicitas, "but not seriously, I think."

It was not a very bad sprain, but still it necessitated complete rest, and Miss Dunbar spent the next two days on a couch, Nan reading to her or playing cards with her, and Erroll in constant attendance.

The third day Erroll did not appear at the usual time. It was the hottest day of a very hot summer, and Miss Dunbar's temper, never her strongest point, gave way altogether under the strain of heat, the pain of her foot, and the uncertainty of her laggard knight's intentions. She was so extremely disagreeable to Nan, that at last the girl suddenly jumped up, and ran sobbing from the room.

"What's the matter?" asked Lady Thornleigh, waking up. "Why is Nan crying?"

"Oh, how can I tell?" snapped Felicitas, forgetting her usual calm repose of manner. "Temper, I suppose. Aunt Etta, why in the world do you have that *creature* here?"

"Why, Nan always comes. But I asked her earlier than usual this summer, because I thought she would be useful to go about with you. It would look less—less *pointed*. You've never paid me a visit in the country before, and anyone could see your motive for this one."

"He admired me very much in town," said Felicitas, very angrily, and without explaining her personal pronoun, "and I knew he was coming here, so of course I offered a visit. But that little wretch with her doll's face and red cheeks has come in the way, and if it falls through it will be your fault."

"Oh, nonsense! she's a child—just the kind of pretty, baby thing most men notice. There's nothing more in it."

"She'll be very coarse when she gets older," observed Felicitas vindictively. "She's got no real beauty—just the pink-and-white prettiness of rustic seventeen." Felicitas, by the way, was just twenty-seven.

"Well, well, I think you're wrong. Besides, you had to have some other girl with you."

Felicitas muttered something about "old-fashioned notions," and relapsed into ill-tempered silence.

Meantime Nan had found refuge in the woods, and had flung herself down beside the wishing-well, crying passionately. She was crying too violently to hear approaching footsteps, and her heart gave a great jump as she felt two arms draw her upwards, and heard a tender, eager voice say:

"What is it, sweetheart? What is the matter with my darling?"

Nan opened her amazed blue eyes upon Erroll Tremaine, stared at him a moment, then pushed him from her with all her small might.

"Sir Erroll, what do you mean?" she demanded, with majesty.

"I lost my head when I heard you crying," he confessed. "I couldn't help it, for I love you, dear."

"But I thought—Felicitas," faltered Nan, bewildered, and dabbing her eyes with a sopping wet handkerchief.

"Felicitas! Why, darling, who could love a cold, haughty woman of the world like her, beautiful as she is? Nan, sweetest, dearest Nan, tell me if you love me?"

Nan made no particular reply, but hid her dimples on Sir Erroll's shoulder and seemed very comfortable.

Time passes swiftly under such circumstances, and when Nan thought it necessary to look at her watch, she discovered that it was very much later than she had thought.

"Oh, it's tea-time!" she exclaimed. "We must be off at once!"

"I sha'n't come to tea," said Erroll. "I couldn't be civil to Miss Dunbar after the way she's been bullying my darling. I'll come in early to-morrow instead."

They walked together to the gate, and there paused to say good-bye.

"Kiss me, darling!" whispered Erroll. "Just one kiss, my pet."

But Nan was shy and hung her head, so he had to be content with pressing a brief kiss on her rosy cheek, and then he turned back into the wood, while Nan went slowly towards the house.

She had not gone more than a few yards when, glancing towards the terrace, she was horrified to see her godmother and Miss Dunbar glaring at her with an expression that plainly showed they had been witnesses of that tender parting.

As Nan drew near, Miss Dunbar sat bolt upright on her lounge chair, and stared harder than ever.

"You—you cat!" she hissed furiously.

"Come here, Annabel," commanded Lady Thornleigh; and as the small culprit approached, she continued: "I am ashamed of you! I am disgusted. How dare you permit Sir Erroll to kiss you?"

"He—he loves me!" faltered Annabel.

"*Loves* you!" exclaimed Felicitas scornfully. "Ridiculous vanity!"

"Let me tell you, child," went on Lady Thornleigh, "a man does not treat the girl he loves and *respects* as Sir Erroll has treated you. If you have mistaken an idle flirtation for anything serious, I am sorry for you, but I none the less blame you for your forwardness and lack of maidenly modesty.

"I am disappointed in you, Annabel, and must ask you to leave my house to-morrow morning. I will send you to the station in time to catch the ten-twenty train. I do not wish to see you again before you go. Good-bye! No, not a word, I will hear no excuses. Good-bye!"

It was a very humble and dejected Nan who faced the surprise of her family at her unexpected return.

"It was too dull for you, I suppose," said her stepmother, with some asperity.

"No, it was not at all dull," replied Nan very meekly.

"I hope you have not offended Lady Thornleigh by coming off like this?"

"No, I think not. She was quite willing I should go."

"Well, I hope you are satisfied now you have got your own way, and escaped three or four weeks of your visit. You always were the most wilful, disobedient girl in the world, and never can bear to do just as you are told."

Hope was not dead in Nan's heart, and she calculated that Erroll would find out her absence when he called early that day at St. Clement's Wells, and if he wrote at once, she might have a letter from him by the evening post. So she stationed herself by the gate to watch for the postman directly after dinner.

It was a lovely summer evening, and Nan looked like the Spirit of Summer in her white frock, with roses tucked into her white waist-ribbon, roses pinned at her throat, and fastened into her clustering fair curls.

The postman passed.

"Nothing for us? Nothing for me?" cried Nan lamentably.

"Nothing, miss," he answered, with a sympathising glance at the lovely, wistful little face; and Nan's heart gave a sickening thud. Then Lady Thornleigh was right.

It had been nothing but an idle flirtation, and she had been a credulous little fool to take the love-nonsense of a man of the world in earnest.

Very likely they were all laughing at the country-bred, vain simpleton at St. Clement's Wells. She could picture it all, and Nan stamped her foot little passionately, as she turned back to the house.

"Nan!" cried a voice behind her, and somebody pushed the gate open and rushed up to her. "Nan, my own sweetheart!" went on Erroll, smothering her with kisses. "I found out you had been packed off home in disgrace. They didn't tell me at first, but kept on humbugging me, else I'd have been here long ago. Now, my own, before I go in and ask your father's consent to our marriage, put your arms round my neck, and say: 'Erroll, I love you!'"

And Nan did exactly as she was told.

Vera Serkoff.

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The Course Was Smooth.

"Does the course of their true love run smooth?" "Yes, indeed. There are banks on both sides."

So Absentminded.

The Bride (on the honeymoon): "Why, you only bought one ticket, dear!" The Groom: "By Jove, I never thought of myself."

Rather Angular.

Mr. Richfello: "Miss De Slimm is evidently a woman of many fine points." Rival Belle: "I should say so. Did you see her elbows?"

Beautiful Thought.

She: "Oh, Charley, that gnat has come from your hand to mine." He: "Aw—beautiful thought, that your blood and mine—aw—mingle in the same gnat."

Just the Reverse.

Mrs. Nagleigh: "I suppose you are satisfied now that you made a mistake when you married me." Mr. Nagleigh: "I made the mistake all right, but I'm not satisfied."

An Ingenious Hint.

Frank: "Blanche pinned a tiny flat-iron on my coat last night." Dick: "Do you know what that means?" Frank: "No." Dick: "Why, she wants to press your suit."

The First Step.

Emma: "And, Charlie, dear, would you have really shot yourself if I had refused you?" Charlie: "Indeed I would. I had already sent to four gunsmiths for price lists of revolvers."

Then He Proposed.

Fred: "Suppose I should ask you to be my wife, what would you say?" Anna: "Guess." Fred: "Oh, I haven't the least idea. What would it—er—rhyme with?" Anna: "Guess."

An Awkward Question.

He: "I believe that a man should let his acts speak for themselves." She: "Am I to understand, then, that when you took my hand in yours last night you intended it as a proposal of marriage?"

The Next Best Thing.

"Ah!" sighed she. "I wish you owned a yacht. It would be just lovely to go for a cruise." "Sorry I can't oblige you," replied the young man, "but the best I can offer is a little smack." And the silence was punctured by a sound resembling the explosion of a pop-gun.

Won-derfully Winning.

Bridegroom (after the ceremony): "Maud, you and I are now one. It only remains to be decided which is the one. I tried to win you, didn't I?" Bride: "Yes, Harold." "And I won. That seems to settle it." "Not quite, Harold. You tried to win me. You succeeded. Then you are the winner, are you not?" "Yes, dear." "And I am the won."

Not Constant Love.

"I loved you then, and now——" "It is as I thought. You only love me now and then."

Tommy Knew.

Sunday School Teacher: "Now, Tommy, can you tell me what it is that makes men hunt for pearls and diamonds." Tommy: "Girls."

Showed His Sense.

Old Bullion: "What? You wish to marry my daughter? She is a mere schoolgirl yet." Suitor: "Yes, sir. I came early to avoid the rush."

Dyeing Would Spoil Him.

"I would die for you!" exclaimed her elderly lover passionately. "Oh, don't!" she answered in alarm. "I like your hair and moustache so much better as they are!"

Bobby Had Heard.

Mrs. Flashout: "Yes, Bobby; all these beautiful silk dresses of mine come from a poor, little, insignificant worm!" Bobby: "Yes, mamma; and papa is the worm, isn't he?"

She Spoke With Authority.

Madge: "Pa, that nice young fellow, Mr. Downing, is awful fond of kissing." Pater: "How did you find that out, you good-for-nothing girl?" Madge: "I had it from his own lips, pa."

A Serious Malady.

Singleton: "Do you agree with the doctors who consider kissing dangerous?" Benedict: "Oh, yes." Singleton: "What dread effect do you think is likely to arise from it?" Benedict: "Marriage!"

Not Necessary to Throw.

"You are not angry with me because I threw a kiss to you, are you?" he asked. "Yes, I am," she replied. "Why?" he inquired. "Because there was no impenetrable barrier between us that made it necessary."

Marriage as a Life Saver.

She: "A doctor in Berlin, after a great deal of study has discovered that married men live longer than bachelors." He (imploringly): "Save my life!" She (joyously): "Oh, Clarence, how did you guess that I loved you?"

He Knew the Cause.

"When does the wedding take place?" inquired the old stationer jestingly. "Why, you don't think——" She blushed and hesitated. "Ah, miss, when young ladies buy a hundred sheets of paper and only twenty-five envelopes, I know there is always something behind it."

Insult to Injury.

Smith (angrily): "I understand you said my face would stop a motor-car." Jones: "I certainly never said anything of the kind." Smith: "Then I must have been misinformed." Jones: "That's what you have. Instead of stopping at the sight of your face, any reputable motor-car would increase its speed."

He Narrowly Escaped.

Young Lady: "I suppose you have had some narrow escapes, Lieutenant Dashaway?" Lieutenant Dashaway: "Y-a-a-s. Awfully narrow escape once, bah Jove!" Young Lady (breathlessly): "In what way?" Lieutenant Dashaway: "Vewy near ordahed on active service, don'tcherknow, but the war came to an end before we embarked."

Then He Collapsed.

He had called on her several times, and finally mustered up courage and assurance to be somewhat more affectionate than the circumstances warranted, perhaps. "You must not do that," she said, somewhat nervously. "Take your arm away at once." "Why?" "My brother might come in suddenly and see you." "Well, what of that? He couldn't kill me!" "No, I suppose not; but he would try to borrow some money from you, and I have lost two chances already by his doing that."

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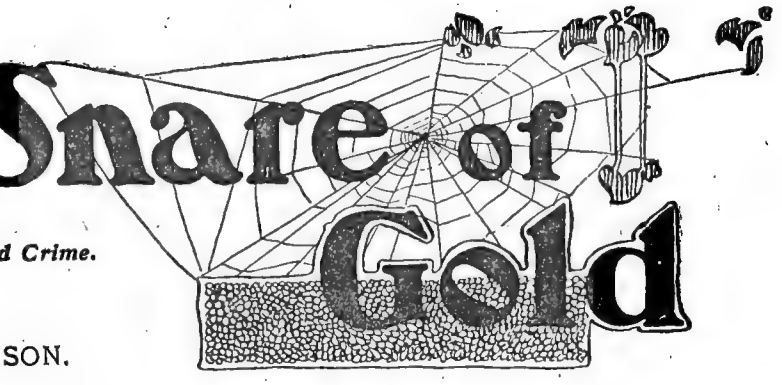
NEW SERIAL STORY. **START TO-DAY.**

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

BEGIN READING HERE.

George Geldart, a rich City merchant, awakens to find that he is lying in a coffin, wrapped in grave clothes. Fearful lest he may lose consciousness again before he properly realises his surroundings, he clambers out of the sexagon.

There are voices!—those of a man and woman. Moving by instinct, he flings aside a wardrobe door and hides within. It is his son Eric, and his adopted daughter Clare talking. From their conversation he learns that his younger son, Ronald, has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

A tap at the door! Geldart hears the frou-frou of the girl's skirt as she goes from the room, and presently he hears another voice, the voice of Boanerges Blagdon, his business partner, whom he has so often befriended.

It then transpires that Eric Geldart and Blagdon have conspired to end the life of the former's father. Eric demands a price from Blagdon for recovering some of the latter's promissory notes from his father's possession—old Geldart had noticed their disappearance, and thought that he had been robbed of them by Ronald. Blagdon promises that Eric shall have his price, then they leave the room.

Geldart slips swiftly out of the wardrobe, and, taking with him various articles, deposits them in the coffin, putting the lid back in its place. Then the undertaker's men come in and screw it down.

No sooner is this done than Ronald enters the room, and his father hears him bemoaning the fact that the body is out of sight, and his heart goes out to the son he has so cruelly wronged.

Click! Once again the door is closed. Ronald is gone!

And then George Geldart leaves his hiding-place again, dons a suit and hat of tweeds, an overcoat, and a pair of boots; then, watching his opportunity, he slips downstairs and out of the great house which can never more be his home.

George Geldart is penniless! He determines to go to Ronald, but on reaching the hotel where his son was staying, he is informed that the boy has gone no one knows where. He strolls out into the streets and there sees what is supposed to be his own funeral, pass, attended with much pomp and show. Then he feels his unutterable loneliness, and is wondering in what direction to turn his steps, when he is greeted in a hearty manner by a man called Stanyer, whom Geldart had known in his youth.

In his will George Geldart disinherits Ronald, and leaves practically everything to Eric, who, with the help of Lord Lynton, puts up for Parliament as Pro-Con: (Progressive-Conservative) candidate for Little Claverton, and is duly elected. He falls in love with Madeleine Lorraine, Lord Lynton's daughter, though he is pledged to marry Clare Armitage, his adopted sister.

After the reading of the will Ronald leaves the house and while wandering aimlessly along the streets, manages to stop a pair of runaway horses attached to a brougham.

Ronald is borne to a doctor's, and there learns that he has saved the life of Madeleine Lorraine, who was in the carriage.

Stanyer has made a fortune in business in Australia, and wants someone to look after things in England for him. He offers the position to Geldart, and the latter, telling him nothing of what has transpired, agrees to act for him, and sets up an office in Crosby Square.

Here Geldart meets with Mr. Sampson Scrimshaw, Company Promoter, who has offices in the same building.

Recovering from his accident, Ronald is able to come to the assistance of another girl, Phyllis Daventry, who has been attacked by two pickpockets. His efforts to find a situation have, so far, been in vain, and he is contemplating the necessity of leaving Mrs. Skimper's boarding-house where he had taken up his residence.

Eric Geldart, on the very night in which the fate of the Government hangs in the balance, makes a brilliant maiden speech in the House, and mainly on account of his efforts the momentous division goes against the Ministry. Eric is the recipient of hearty congratulations, not the least warm being those of Madeleine Lorraine, the girl he has set himself to win in love. He strolls on to the terrace of the House, however, and there meets his half-sister—Clare Armitage. He is greatly tempted to murder her by pushing her into the Thames, but at the fateful moment his courage fails him.

Meanwhile Sampson Scrimshaw and Geldart, whom the former calls "Old Mystery," have become close acquaintances. Scrimshaw tells him that it is his intention to stand for Parliament, and his rival candidate will be Boanerges Blagdon—the traitorous partner of George Geldart, City merchant.

The latter receives a cable from Stanyer saying, "Hear you have been dead four months. Explain." The previous instalment ends by leaving him meditating over this last turn in his curious history, and wondering what will be the next development.

On the next page begins another absorbing instalment.

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THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT.

TENTH CHAPTER.
"We'll Spoil their Little Game."

GELDART was aroused from his reverie by a shadow on the threshold. No, not a shadow, surely rather a burst of sunshine, for, looking up, roused, by a silver "May I come in?" he beheld a girl in the very early summertime of her maidenhood, whose shapely little head gleamed with a far brighter gold than that of which he had been thinking, that blood red gold the devil uses wherewith to bait his snares!

"Aha, come in, my dear!" he said cheerfully, "come in and sit down!" recognising in this winsome presence of the liquid grey and shining though thoughtful eyes, the sweet, grave, rosebud mouth, and the cheeks with the pink bloom of apple blossom, the one intermediary between the dreary apology for an office on the second floor, and the spacious premises upon the first. Then in a tone of keen concern he went on:

"Why, why, Miss Daventry, what's the matter with your arm?" for he noticed that one plump, black-sleeved, snowy-cuffed little arm rested in a sling. "Been vaccinated again?"

"Oh, no, I had an adventure last night!" the girl answered, laying a sheaf of papers on his desk, "a dreadful adventure, daddy. I was set upon by a couple of those dreadful people they call Hooligans."

"What!" The eyes beneath the bushy grey eyebrows blazed.

"I was, really! I noticed them shadowing me along the Euston Road, I turned down a side street to avoid them, the worst thing I could have done, and in a quiet, deserted, narrow street they set upon me, one twisted my poor little wrist, and the other tugged at my chain."

"The wretches! But I see they didn't get your chain. You were rescued from them?"

"Yes, just in the nick of time, by, oh, such a dear, nice fellow, quite young, but, oh! so powerful, and as handsome as——" She paused for a comparison.

"Well, say Apollo," said Old Mystery, "or Mars."

"Well, he seemed more like a fighting god than an artist on the—lyre, wasn't it? And such a gentleman, so different from Mr. Springle and the imitation sort."

"Springle! That's the young idiot with his neck in a bandbox that Scrimshaw bullies for blundering."

"Oh, yes!" laughed Phyllis merrily. "It's no end of fun to watch him lording it over the office-boy and shivering before the governor. But bother Mr. Scrimshaw! You don't seem deeply interested in my narrow escape."

And then she went on to detail her unpleasant experiences with the unknown ruffians, and her pleasanter experience of the unknown hero.

"And you have not seen him or heard from him since?" the old man asked.

Phyllis shook her head negatively, adding, with a sigh, "And never shall, I suppose. It was like a beautiful dream, he came on the scene just in the nick of time, then, just like a dream, he was gone; I suppose for evermore."

"Dear, dear!" said the old man, with a smile playing about the corners of his mouth, "and it rather seems, my pretty Phyllis, that although you saved your golden chain you lost your golden heart. Phyllis, Phyllis, have a care!"

"Daddy, don't talk nonsense!" said Mr. Scrimshaw's lady clerk, with mock severity. "To business, sir, if you please."

"I am all attention," answered Old Mystery. "Speak, thy servant heareth."

"Mr. Scrimshaw wants you to file these papers and lock them in your safe after registering them under 'Miscellaneous Memoranda,' in the Private Accounts Book."

Old Mystery carelessly turned over the bundle of papers.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "What's this? 'Proposal for a loan to Viscount Lynton to be secured primarily on his lordship's estates and collaterally by policies of assurance on his lordship's life.' What a little world it is," the old man muttered.

"Mr. Scrimshaw will speak to you about that presently."

"I should think so," said Old Mystery sententiously. "The estates are mortgaged up to the hilt, and, if the offices would take old Lynton, he couldn't find the premiums. And—hullo!—What's this? 'Correspondence with Executive of Progressive Conservative Association.' Why, the world gets smaller and smaller!"

"Mr. Scrimshaw is going to talk to you about that also," said Phyllis. "In fact, he's discussing the matter now with Mr. Eric Geldart."

"What," said Old Mystery, looking up, "is Eric Geldart beneath this roof?"

"He is, indeed, and he's beneath the ceiling which is just beneath this floor. Do you know him, daddy?"

"I've heard of him."

"Of course, so has everybody," replied Phyllis. "He's a rising man, they say, but I don't know what's happened between him and Mr. Scrimshaw, they used to be quite friendly, but Mr. Geldart is as stand-offish with the governor as if he were not merely a member of Parliament, but Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer as well."

"Ah, that's the way of the world, my dear Phyllis! Circumstances alter not only cases but people, and very often the improvement of the circumstances tends to the deterioration of the people."

"That's very horrid," said Phyllis, "and I don't think it's altogether true. For instance, whatever your circumstances might be, I think you'd always be a dear, good, kind old gentleman. And, after all, Mr. Geldart is very good style."

"And you girls think a lot of style."

"Oh, yes, style is everything! Do you know, he quite put me in mind of that splendid fellow who rescued me last night from those ruffians, only he was not only better-looking, but brighter altogether, and not quite, I should think, so hard as Mr. Geldart."

"Oh, Eric Geldart is hard, is he?"

"I should imagine so, because when Mr. Scrimshaw and he were getting to high words, the governor said to him, "You weren't quite so off-handed before your father died and left you all his money," and Mr. Geldart answered, "Perhaps not. When that obstinate old blunderer held the reins I hadn't a free hand, but now I'm on the box seat, and I drive in my own way, at my own pace."

"He said that, did he?" asked Old Mystery.

"Yes, and Mr. Scrimshaw gave him a piece of his mind. He said, 'Look here, Geldart, I never knew your governor, though I've often heard of him, he was in a different swim to mine, but if you want to slang your own father do it in somebody else's hearing, not in mine.'"

"And what did Eric Geldart say?"

"I didn't catch it. I think he was a bit ashamed of himself. But I mustn't stop chattering here all day, I shall get a scolding, only, daddy, I like to tell you things, you are so kind and wise. Had you ever a little daughter of your own, daddy?"

The old man shook his head.

"I think you'd have been a kind father to her, that's why I talk so to you, and perhaps it's not having a dear, real daddy of my own."

"Is that so, Phyllis?"

"Yes," said the girl gently.

"When did he die?"

"He didn't die, daddy. Years ago he went away." The troubled look which he had noted when once before he had spoken to Phyllis of her father came into her eyes again.

"Your pardon," he said. "I—I did not mean to be inquisitive."

"I know—I know," she answered quickly, her face looking all the more like a rose leaf because of the tears that glistened like April dews upon it, "you are all kindness and sympathy, that's why I'll tell you.

"Years before my mother died, my father went away, he was unfortunate, deplorably and persistently, and, as he

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couldn't be a help to mother, he cut himself adrift from her; that was his meaning, I know, when he left her to look for fortune in far lands, but mother couldn't see it in that light, she only felt she was deserted, abandoned. After he went she wouldn't even bear his name, and went back to her own."

"And you've never seen or heard of him since?"

"Never," said Phyllis, "but I think of him always, though, except just now and in my prayers, I never speak of him."

"And so there's only mother?"

"No mother either, daddy, only just my own little self."

"Your own dear little self? Well, it's a good little self, and it must take care of its dear little self. God bless it!"

"And God bless you, daddy, and now good-bye."

As she flitted out of the room it seemed all grey and bare again.

"Charming little soul!" said the old man, just as one might speak of a blithe singing bird, and Old Mystery turned over the papers she had left listlessly, almost wearily.

All of a sudden he sat erect, absorbed in the perusal of one of them. It related to negotiations between the executive of the Progressive Conservative Association relative to Mr. Scrimshaw's proposed candidature, and they wound up with an intimation that, while the executive recognised Mr. Scrimshaw's contributions to the cause, and relied upon his support, they were unable to offer him a seat at present, inasmuch as Mr. Blagdon, long the prospective candidate, had definitely decided to stand for Brixwell.

"So," said Old Mystery, "he is nearing the goal of his ambition at last. He has been vestryman, churchwarden, district councillor and all the rest—the whited sepulchre—and now at last he is making a bid for M.P. The unctuous humbug! The thief! The arch traitor. I've got a long score to settle with him; it was he that made my Eric a thief and rogue, to hide his own iniquities."

He went on docketing and scribbling for hours, never pausing in his work until another footstep sounded on the stair, and Scrimshaw burst into the room, flushed and furious.

"The ungrateful hound!" he shouted, banging his fist upon the desk.

"Well, what have I done now?" asked Old Mystery.

"Not you—not you, that villain Geldart!"

Geldart, despite himself, started at the mention of his own name, and involuntarily exclaimed:

"What on earth do you mean? What have I done?"

"I tell you I'm not talking about you," almost screamed Scrimshaw. "That chap Geldart's thrown me over, he and Blagdon have done it between them, the young 'un's a bit flush just now, but I'll get level with them—if it snows."

"What's happened?" asked the old man, scanning the other with a keen, grave look.

"Geldart's thrown me over. It was a solemn bond, and on the faith of it I let accounts stand between us, that at the next election his party were to nominate and support me for Brixwell; since then the tide's turned, the dissolution has taken place, they're going to run his partner Blagdon for the borough that I've been nursing for the last year, there's no time for me to cut in anywhere else, and they snap their fingers at me."

"But I thought you had young Geldart under your thumb," Old Mystery observed. The other answered:

"So I had, until his father died."

Again the icy chill struck at the old man's heart. Until his father died! Why, then, his death was waited for, welcomed as an emancipation.

"How about his thousand overdue?" he asked.

"He could raise that. Don't you see, the man's a power now. Lytton was wrong, it's the easiest world that ever was to borrow in, if you've got security, besides, no doubt Blagdon's paying his price. But I'd give anything, I'd do anything to spoil their little game."

"Suppose I spoil it for you," said Old Mystery.

"You! How?"

And Mystery repeated his question.

"Well, then, I'll be your pal to the death. I'll stand by you through thick and thin. Look here, Old Mystery, we're both a bit out of the common run, if another man had said what you've said, I should have put him down for an idiot, or a boaster, but if you think you can stop Blagdon's little game, why, then I'm sure you can. I know you know the man, and I know that you can be a staunch good pal and partner, and I can understand that you could be a dangerous foe."

ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Reminder of the Past.

You all know Brixwell, that demi-semi-select London suburb hovering on the South-Western border line, ever striving, in spite of the Post Office authorities, to wrench itself within it; that suburb of cheap trams, cheap villas, cheap side, where the jerry builder flourishes exceedingly and where cheap villadom is at home upon its Thursdays.

Only a little while ago it was almost a sylvan district, where pleasant meadows stretched, where market gardens sweetened the air, where quaint old latticed windows blinked from pleasant gables in the shade of waving boughs.

Where once the market waggons lumbered through may-thorn hedges, electric trams hum and buzz and clang between jaundiced rows of houses of new and bilious yellow brick; the quaint old hostelries have given place to flaunting gin palaces, and the gardens are represented by sixteen feet forecourts in front of edifices where The Oaks, The Elms, The Beeches, The Cedars, and The Poplars exist only in name and imagination.

Brixwell is not your suburb? Certainly not, dear sir, or madam, but you know where Brixwell is, and you know the Smiths, or Browns, and perhaps the Joneses and Robinsons who live there in so pretentious a style on so paltry a scale.

But once, in the days when London's citizens were content to dwell where they worked and thrived, and only the wealthy ones had country houses, and when Brixwell, or your own select suburb, was far more distant than Brighton is now, Brixwell was a favourite sojourning place of the very well-to-do, the substantial set who flourished and waxed sleek and bounteous before that trumpery thing of shreds and patches, the "smart set," just, happily, dying, had been born or thought of.

The people who live in Brixwell now are, though they would be aghast to hear one say it, of comparatively little importance, but the dead who sleep there are of some standing. For there you shall find old family vaults, green and grey with the mosses of centuries.

Now it happened that on the afternoon following Scrimshaw's outburst detailed in the preceding chapter, Old Mystery was coming along the one still rural road in Brixwell leading to this quaint God's Acre, when he was startled by a familiar and gentle voice exclaiming:

"Why, daddy, and this is where you spend your Saturday half holiday!"

"Phyllis, my dear, why, where are you going?

"Ah!" He needed no answer, having glanced at the basket of flowers she carried, and he asked another question, "For whom are they?"

"For mother," she answered.

"Good little girl," he said. "May I come with you there?"

"Yes," she said simply. And side by side the strange old man and the bright, winsome girl passed through the gateway leading to within the walls of the city of the sleeping, wound their way amid the mounds and the stones and monuments, and cenotaphs, the highways and byways of the metropolis where mortal men and women dwell side by side, with never a note of discord, in a beautiful town that needs no policing, where none beg, or borrow, or steal from one another, where animosity is unknown, where all are lowly, though none are ashamed, where all that there is of pride is the work of those who had not when that work was done taken up the freedom of that city.

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And soon little Phyllis' Mecca was reached.

Old Mystery, with bared head, stood aside while the little girl laid on a simple mound her wreath of simple flowers, and, taking from her basket her little trowel, planted here and there a fern, uprooted here and there a weed, a thorn.

Her pious task fulfilled, they withdrew. The girl's eyes softened, yet scarce with tears. She had bedewed that verdant mound most bountifully almost from her childhood from the crystal fount of her pure heart, but the time had come when she had only the sunshine of a smile, as pure as her tears, for that spot as green in her heart as it was to the light of Heaven.

And as they walked side by side along between the tombs and in the shadow of the cypresses, the old man wondered whether the spirits of any whose mortal ashes laid beneath the tons of granite and the sculptured marble looked down upon more tender tributes to their memory than those simple flowers the simple little working girl had placed upon her mother's grave.

For instance—— Suddenly he checked his steps.

"Isn't that handsome?" said Phyllis, pointing to a ponderous cenotaph of black marble inlaid with Aberdonian granite, with many tablets on its sides cut deep in granite and in marble, and here and there filled in with lead, where the work of human hands had striven just a little longer to baffle "Time's effacing fingers."

"Geldart!" she exclaimed. "Why, yes! This is the family vault of the Mr. Geldart that we know. Well, Mr. Scrimshaw can say what he likes, he must have been a good son, look!"

And Old Mystery read—

Also to the memory of
GEORGE GELDART
relict of the above,
Who departed this life on the 15th day of December, 1901.
In the 65th year of his age.
Greatly respected and lamented
By all who knew him.
An exemplary husband, an indulgent father, a pattern citizen.
This tablet is here placed to his memory by
His sorrowing son
Eric Cosmo Geldart, Esq., M.P., for Little Claverton.
In the First Parliament of His Majesty King Edward VII.
In token of filial gratitude and undying affection.
"By their works ye shall know them."

"Why, daddy!" exclaimed the girl. "What's the matter, aren't you feeling well? Your face is quite white. Perhaps it is rather cold and clammy here, let's come away."

"Yes, yes," he said, and together they wandered along the sidewalk, lingering here and there to read some quaint or tender epitaph, to note the long journey ended at this or that tomb, or here and there with a sigh, to read of some tender baby flower cut off in bud, saved from life's sorrows, but at the cost of more sorrow for those death's hand had spared.

While Phyllis, with tender eyes, stooped to read the record of one such little life, Old Mystery, wandering to and fro, peering through the gloom of cypresses and sycamores, caught sight of an approaching form, and, catching sight of it, swiftly withdrew into the shadow of a drooping willow.

It was Ronald—Yes, in that willow shade he watched his son—it seemed his *only* son, since that other had proved so undutiful—his face all pale and grave with lines of sorrow

(*Continued overleaf.*)

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A COMPLETE DISPENSARY IN THEMSELVES.

AND OINTMENT

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written deep on it, watched him draw near that marble mass, and lay there at the foot of his lying brother's lying inscription, a wreath of summer flowers, saw him linger there bareheaded, then turn away along the path straight to the willow in whose shade Old Mystery stood. And the old man stealthily stole away, threading his way to the gates.

Almost he was impelled to retrace his steps, and there, amid the tombs, reveal himself, and tell the strange, weird story to the son he had disinherited, the only son who in truth had mourned for him. But then—but then—a thousand thoughts surged through his brain.

In that place, at that hour, a shock would be cruel, it might be fatal, and then—there was Blagdon to be reckoned with, and his Scheme—yes, he was testing his System and himself, as well as others.

Anyway, he must have time to think, and so, in place of turning back, he went on his way towards the obscure and lowly lodging where he lived. Yes, where he lived, he whom the world believed dead, lying still and mute beneath that mass of granite and black marble, engraven with a lie from beginning to end.

And on Monday morning, Phyllis Daventry, tripping upstairs with a sheaf of letters, cried:

"Daddy, where did you vanish to on Saturday? I looked round for you and you were gone, I waited, oh, ever so long!"

"I missed my way," Old Mystery stammered. "Yes, yes, I missed my way, and it was so late I thought you had gone home."

"That's what I thought of you," said Phyllis. "But, oh! I say, daddy, whom do you think I met, just by the cemetery gate?"

"I can't tell; that idiot Springle, I suppose—he's always shadowing you, isn't he?"

"Oh, dear, no! not Mr. Springle, someone altogether different; guess, guess!"

"I can't, you silly girl; I'm not good at riddles; besides, I'm busy—it's Monday, I have a lot to do, there's a heavy mail to-night."

"But you must guess, daddy, I've told you so much about him. I met him, daddy—the gentleman who saved me from those ruffians who were trying to rob me."

"Ha! ha! who saved your chain, your chain with its heart charm. Ha! ha! yes, Phyllis, I remember, and who charmed away your heart. And then of course the Garden of Sleep was transformed into Arcadia, with Strephon in a silk hat, with a silk umbrella for a crook; Chloe in a sailor hat and blouse surrounded by a flock—of tombstones. Is Strephon captive yet?"

"Daddy, don't be silly; he never spoke a word, I don't think he even saw me. Poor fellow, he was walking along with his head down, looking quite sad and careworn."

TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Ronald Falls on his Feet.

Little wonder that Ronald Geldart's face when the little lady clerk beheld it, bore signs of care, for in truth since their first meeting he had been experiencing a trying time.

He had set himself to work and turned out matter which he without vanity felt would be printable, and with this under his arm in the form of short stories, he assailed the editorial offices.

Next he awaited results, awaited them with the earnest longing of a shipwrecked man, who, clinging to the rigging, awaits the saving sail. They came—in the form of his own manuscripts—declined with thanks.

Then he set forth to beard the lions in their dens. The lions, however, either didn't happen to be in their dens at the time, or being there, declined to be bearded, their time as a rule being as minutely apportioned as that of an eminent K.C. or fashionable physician in extensive practice.

Ronald was not easily disheartened, but he had gone through a considerable spell of stress and storm, his resources had run out and Mrs. Skimper's bill was overdue, and that lady had impressed on him, with some asperity, that her house was established for the reception of *paying* guests. And Mrs. Skimper's demand, if acidulated, was a just one, the sting of her sarcasm was as nothing to Ronald compared with the shame of indebtedness to a woman. His watch had already gone, his chain had followed, so also all his overcoats.

There was still Eric. In the morning and evening papers there was his name looming large; at the dinner-table and in omnibus and trains he heard people discoursing on his rocket-like upward flight. No! no! no! not while there was a heap of stones to be broken, a truck to be run along a dock or river quay, a crossing to be swept, never would he approach the man whose brotherhood, whose very name he had renounced.

One night he sat alone in his room while his fellow-guests were dining. He had pleaded indisposition, but the truth was he could not sit there eating the bread and quivering beneath the scorn of the woman who was his creditor.

If land had been in sight it would not so much have mattered, but things seemed drifting from bad to worse; he never could have believed in his better days that it was so difficult for the man who wore a black coat, finding himself suddenly bereft of means, to earn his bread.

A tap at the door. He opened it; it was Arethusa the maid-of-all-work.

"Your boots, Mr. Bligh," she said, "which I have done my best with them."

"Thanks very much, Arethusa," said Ronald, scanning them ruefully; then he laughed, "I'm afraid they're so bad that even your best won't make much of them."

"Oh, bless you, sir, they're all right," said Arethusa; "only I took the liberty of putting in a cardboard sole in case you might get cold. And, Mr. Bligh, sir, if you've got any socks as wants mending I can take 'em down with me, and I noticed that button on your coat was a trifle loose."

"Arethusa, you're a good little soul," said Ronald, feeling for the moment heart and throat as full as his pockets were empty, "and one of these days I hope I shall be able to make it right with you."

"Lor', don't mention that, sir; tips is tips, but there's some people it's more pleasure to work for free gratis, while others, with the wealth of Injies, as the saying is, is gall and wormwood to work for."

Again he could only ejaculate rather huskily: "You are a good little soul!"

"No, I ain't, sir—I'm only a hard working little skivvy in a boardin'-house, but I knows what's what. Lor' bless you, sir, I knows things ain't very bright with you just at the moment, but they will be later on; a smart young gentleman like you, and, as for what Mrs. Skimper said to you to-day, sir, which I heard it, that's nothin' to what she says to Mr. Springle; your bill ain't nothin' to what his is sometimes."

Great Heavens! Ronald bit his lip. What had he come to? To be commiserated by a lodging-house servant whose mistress had dunned him!

Arethusa, going on with her dusting, continued, confidentially:

"And, Mr. Bligh, sir, you won't be offended at what I'm going to say, will yer?"

"No, Arethusa, you're too genuine and good a little girl to offend me, I'm sure."

"Well, sir, if as how you should be in a very desp'rit hole, if you wouldn't mind of my sayin' of it, I've got a bit of money in the Post Office, and if a couple of soverings, sir——"

"What!" almost screamed out Ronald.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Arethusa, trembling, "only you know it seemed to me perhaps the Post Office wasn't quite so safe as having the money in my box, and I thought if you'd do me the honour of taking care of it for me—— You ain't angry, sir?" for Ronald, his hand in his pockets, was

(*Continued on page 318.*)

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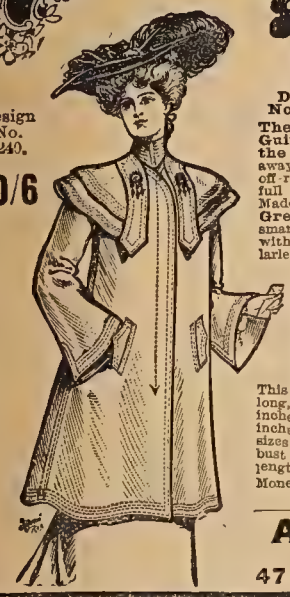

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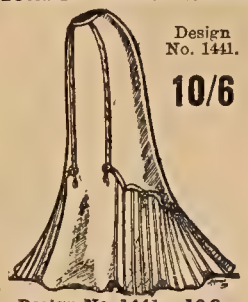

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standing in front of her, scanning her up and down, struggling for a time for words, which were slow in coming.

"You black-visaged, golden-haired little girl, I'll candidly admit you're one of the best-meaning creatures who ever put blacking on tanned boots or left a thumbmark on a plate, but if ever you dare make such a suggestion as that again, I'll—I'll run away, Arethusa—run away!"

Bundling her out he shut the door behind her, then sat down clutching his forehead with his hands. Something would have to be done. Yes! on the morrow he'd sell the few remnants of his wardrobe, buy a set of slops, square up Mrs. Skimper and ship before the mast, if nothing else turned up.

And that next morning there was a confidence in his manner which inspired Mrs. Skimper with a belief that she was not going to add another to her list of bad debts, after all. She was not an ill-natured woman, but the catering for and supplying the wants, reasonable and unreasonable, and coping with the bickerings and idiosyncrasies of indifferently-paying guests had told upon her.

"Better this morning, Mr. Bligh?"

"Yes, thanks; as right as rain!" said Ronald cheerfully.

"Breakfast will be ready in five minutes, and I should think you have an appetite."

"No, thanks," said Ronald; "the fact is I've an early appointment, and I shall no doubt breakfast out."

Mrs. Skimper touched a bell, then Mrs. Skimper put her back to the hall door.

"Mr. Bligh," she said, "you're not going out of this house without bacon and eggs or kippers or cold mutton, whichever you prefer, with marmalade, bread-and-butter, tea or coffee, according to choice, *ad lib.* Arethusa, Mr. Bligh's breakfast at once.

"Now you come and sit down like a good young gentleman. I was in a bad temper yesterday, and with Mr. Grimmage on one side of the table, Mr. Springle on the other, and Miss Amaranth from half-past ten till one and half-past two till five playing Wagner on that poor piano of mine, which is already showing signs of nervous exhaustion, it's a wonder I wasn't in screaming hysterics. Now, here's your serviette and here's Arethusa coming upstairs with the eggs and bacon; I can smell them. Now, don't waste time, drink your coffee while it's hot."

To have resisted would have been ungracious. Ronald left the house that morning with hope in his heart, hope born of gratitude and faith in human nature.

And not even half a dozen fruitless calls quite crushed that newborn hope, though his handbag was the heavier for some three or four manuscripts returned.

He felt that if he had the chance he could do well, well for himself and for those enlisting him, who took him in their ranks.

The day was wearing on, one by one the covers he had picked on had been drawn blank. What was the next move? Ah, yes! the *Meteor*, the organ of the cultured world, the newly-prospected weekly, about which there was so many rumours; that it was the venture of a certain leading lady in high society, that it was the bantling of an inner Parliamentary circle, that the Rothschilds were going to run it, that Sir Thomas Lipton was finding the money, that a certain Duke was controlling it to air his own opinions on fiscal and political matters; a hundred rumours were afloat about it.

Ronald, bracing himself to face another disappointment, entered offices spick and span and a trifle odoriferous from the hands of fitters, carpenters, joiners and painters, and inquired of a smart young man across a smart new counter if the editor were in.

"No, sir," was the prompt reply.

"The assistant editor?"

"No, sir!" equally prompt and decisive.

"Have you any idea when I can find him in?"

The smart youth knew his work too well to have any idea. Would Ronald leave his card.

"I merely called to ascertain if the editor had any views about some manuscripts I sent some weeks ago."

"Don't know, sir. Mr. Carnforth is very, very busy with a truck-load of them now; perhaps you'd better write. Good afternoon, sir."

Ronald turned wearily away. Behind him there was the sound of opening doors, a bustling familiar voice said:

"Just going to get a chop, Charles; sha'n't be long, don't let the governor be disturbed. Why—bless my soul! it's Ronnie. Eh, my lad, where have you been? By Jove! I'm glad to see you!" For it was cousin Jack whose left hand was smacked upon his shoulder, whose right was frantically shaking his own; cousin Jack who was asking a dozen questions without waiting for an answer; cousin Jack who took him over the road to the Cecil and, ordering a comfortable lunch, said:

"Now, Ronnie, come on, I am going to sit quite still while you tell me where you've been hiding, why you've been hiding, and what you've been doing."

Lunch was well nigh through ere Ronald had told his story; then he asked:

"Now, cousin Jack, what of you?"

"Oh, my lad," said Jack, rubbing his hands. "I'm going strong. I've struck blue clay."

"You deserve it; you've tried as hard as anybody."

"Yes, but I've kept pegging away though it seemed as if I should never get a bulls-eye, but so long as you keep pegging away at the target it'll come in time, though scarcely ever at the time and in the way you've looked for.

"You know the many things I've tried, the speculations I've dabbled in, mostly burning my fingers; club secretary, insurance broker, theatre manager; as dear Eric in his amiable fashion used to say: 'Jack of all trades and master of none.'"

"You were always ready and willing to do good to others," said Ronald; "perhaps that accounted for your not doing better for yourself."

"No! no! don't believe that, Ronnie, that's very sour philosophy. As a matter of fact, it was just the fact of having been able to lend a helping hand in a small sort of way, years ago that led to my getting into clover when I was on the hardest of hard pan. I'll tell you how it was."

(Another long instalment of this story will appear next week.)

"You say he died from a single blow administered by himself?" "Yes, he blew out the gas!"

She: "I want to get a pint of your best enamel." Assistant: "Yes, madam. Face or bicycle?"

"Did you hear Kusser has dyspepsia?" "No; how did he get it?" "Slugem made him eat his own words."

"Will you love me when I'm old?" she asked. "Certainly," he replied promptly, "if you will love me when I am bald."

The Young Sweet Thing: "I wonder how it is there is no good English equivalent for *fiancé?*" The Savage Bachelor: "How about 'idiot'?"

"I hear you've given up your proposed trip to Norway this summer." "Yes. The girl who is taking singing lessons next door has been invited to spend the summer with her aunt in Devonshire, so there is really no reason why we should go away."

"I can't understand it," said Mr. Gewgaw at the gas office. "Last quarter my bill was twenty-five shillings, and this quarter it is £2 10s. I haven't burnt a bit more gas this quarter than I did last. Now, how in the name of honesty do you account for that?" "You didn't pay last quarter's bill," said the clerk.

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Cool Young Lady.

"EVELYN" has a young gentleman friend who has asked her to become engaged to him. He is a very good fellow and much in earnest. "EVELYN" cannot decide whether to accept him or not. At times she feels she could care for him, but at others is distinctly cool. He tells her that if she does not say "Yes," life will not be worth living. Should "EVELYN" believe him, and answer him "Yes"? She adds. "You may think it rather strange of me not to know my own mind, but I am neither romantic nor sentimental."

* * * * *

You have known the young man five or six years, "EVELYN," and evidently admire him. You have had every opportunity of knowing whether or not you feel tenderly towards him. Apparently you do not, but you are "neither romantic nor sentimental." Well, you may be one of those luke-warm young ladies who never experience any deep passions. There are many of that kind. My advice usually is that they should marry the man they feel they are most fond of and whom they most admire, and trust to the future to bring the needed love. It often follows after marriage, if on the part of one there is the feeling of love.

Love versus Mammon.

I HAVE had a manly letter from "TROUBLED WATERS," who certainly deserves all the sympathy one can give him. He has a business of his own, and a well-to-do father, who has financed him, and with whom he lives. He has also a sweetheart, who is "the best girl in the world," and the envy of all the fellows in the neighbourhood. However, she is only a cotton weaver, though one of very noble character, and his parents will not hear of an engagement. So strong is his father on the point that he says that if "TROUBLED WATERS" insists on keeping to the girl he must leave home, and get on in his business without another penny from him.

* * * * *

"TROUBLED WATERS" does not want to leave his old home, and cannot yet afford to get married, but his father has given him three months to make up his mind. If he leaves her for one month, he says, all the young men of the neighbourhood will pay their attentions to the girl, as she is much admired. If "TROUBLED WATERS" decides to stick to her, he thinks that by hard work he could make enough money to marry upon in three years, when he will be twenty-four.

* * * * *

The position is a very difficult one. It seems very cruel of your father to take up his present attitude. But if you are absolutely in love with the girl, and feel that she is necessary to your happiness in life and not a mere passing fancy, you should be prepared to make sacrifices for her. It seems unjust that your business should be in danger owing to your love affairs, but as you say you are in possession of it, could you not make a big effort to keep it going without your father's aid? Besides, as you say, there would be the encouragement of love to help you. It is for you to decide. Do you really love the girl sufficiently to sacrifice your father's money and your home on her behalf? Would your future life be unhappy if severed from her? Think it well over, for if your feeling for her is only a passing fancy, you would be doing yourself a great injury to sacrifice your prospects on her behalf.

Taking Girls to Boarding Houses.

"MATER" writes: "I have two young daughters, aged seventeen and eighteen. We shall have two months holiday this year. Should I take them to a seaside boarding house, or would that be unwise?"

* * * * *

Boarding houses drive many a young girl off her head, "MATER." You are sure to encounter there the seaside lover, who is, according to his own painting, a wondrous personage. But if you keep a close chaperonage of the girls, I think a month or so at a boarding house would do them no harm. Girls gain a necessary apprenticeship in the study of human nature that way, and it makes them cautious in future.

Should He Confess His Love?

"I HAVE been going out with a girl for four months," writes "SWEET WILLIAM." "I asked her if she loves me, and she replied 'Yes.' I love her very much myself. Should I wait till she asks me the question, or make a confession of my own love at once? I have kissed her several times, but she has not once kissed me."

* * * * *

You seem to expect the girl to do rather more than her share of the love-making. When a girl has gone so far as to tell a man she loves him, the man is very strange if he does not make some sort of reply. As a general rule, men are only too ready to make those confessions, often without meaning them As you are sincere about the matter, certainly tell her at once. It is strange she has not kissed you. But some people, though affectionate, do not always show their love that way.

Deservable Congratulation.

"I HAVE been the close companion all my life of a girl cousin," writes "PERCY," "who has always asked my advice in everything. Last time we met she seemed very reserved, and was in correspondence with people which I knew nothing about. A month later she told me she was engaged to a man I had never heard of, very much older than herself. Now is it my duty to write and congratulate her?"

* * * * *

Perhaps her reserve was pardonable. She may be the kind of girl who does not like to talk about love affairs unless she is able to announce an engagement, and, for all you know, may be very fond of the man in question. Anyhow, it is her affair whom she marries, and if she has met the man of her heart, then certainly you could write and congratulate her in good faith. An engagement is supposed to mark the happy issue of a love affair, and, as such, one usually congratulates the young couple without considering their merits.

The Attentions of Boys.

"I AM sixteen," writes "M. L.," "and people tell me I am rather good-looking. I am not allowed out much at nights, but when I am there are a few boys who stare at me a great deal. One of them I like very much. How could I get to know him?"

* * * * *

I don't think you had better make any attempts whatever to know strange boys. You are only sixteen, and it is quite right that you should not be allowed out at nights. As to the boys who stare at you, that is usually little more than curiosity and often rudeness, and you should not encourage it. If there is any boy amongst them who is genuinely attracted by you, he will himself try to get to know you in the proper way.

Cynthia

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